

2022-07

# Community dance supports older adults' successful aging, physical literacy, and embodiment: a case study

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Paglione, V. (2022). Community dance supports older adults' successful aging, physical literacy, and embodiment: a case study (Master's thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada).

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Community dance supports older adults' successful aging, physical literacy, and embodiment:

A case study

by

Vanessa Paglione

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN KINESIOLOGY

CALGARY, ALBERTA

JULY, 2022

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## **Abstract**

Community dance offers a physical, artistic, and social activity led by a dance artist, which encourages participation at any age or skill level. As Canada's population ages, there is a need to understand programming which may be enjoyable and motivating to participate in and supports numerous aspects of older adults' lives. Dancing has the potential to support many aspects of health, yet current literature focuses primarily on the physical health benefits of dancing. This thesis examined one specific dance class, striving to gain insight about the holistic benefits related to aging, experiences of physical activity, and embodiment that community dance may offer older adults. The first study included three semi-structured interviews with the dance instructor to explore their perspective on the impact participation in community dance class had on participants, and the pedagogical behaviors used to elicit those benefits when instructing the class. The second study included semi-structured interviews with five older adults to examine their experiences of participating in the community dance class. Collectively, interviews with both the instructor and dancers suggested dancing offered an opportunity for older adults to connect to their own embodiment. Social connection and music were perceived in both studies as essential to the dancing experience. Dance can support feelings of confidence when instructors intentionally strive for participants to experience success. The dance class also offered an opportunity for older adults to connect to their creativity and artistry. Artistry and creativity can positively contribute to one's psychosocial experiences of physical activity and ability to connect with others. Overall, dancing offers a promising activity that supports older adults in numerous aspects of their lives. Policy that supports funding for and access to facilitates to offer community dance programming is needed.

## Preface

The following researchers provided guidance and expertise on the work included in this thesis:

Dr. Sarah Kenny (Supervisor) *Assistant Professor, Faculty of Kinesiology and Faculty of Arts, University of Calgary*

Dr. Meghan McDonough (Co-supervisor) *Professor, Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Calgary*

Dr. Cari Din (Committee member) *Instructor, Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Calgary*

Dr. William Bridel (Committee member) *Associate Professor, Associate Dean Undergraduate Programs, Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Calgary*

This manuscript style thesis includes two co-authored manuscripts, both which are a part of Dr. Sarah Kenny's research project titled *Community dance and contributions towards successful aging among older adults*. This work was approved by the University of Calgary's Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board (REB19-2060).

**“Promoting wellness, having fun, and creating community”: A dance instructor's pedagogical practices and perspectives on the influence of community dance classes for older adults**

Vanessa Paglione, Jenna Magrath, Meghan H. McDonough, Cari Din, Sarah J. Kenny

This article has been submitted and is under review at Research in Dance Education.

**Movement, music, and connection: Older adults' experiences of community dance**

Vanessa Paglione, Sarah J. Kenny, Meghan H. McDonough, Cari Din, Krista White

This article has been submitted to Activities, Adaptation and Aging.

## **Acknowledgements**

Firstly, I would like to thank and acknowledge my supervisors Dr. Sarah Kenny and Dr. Meghan McDonough for their endless guidance, support, and encouragement throughout this journey. I am grateful for your leadership, resilience, and compassion which you led with throughout this time of uncertainty and endless change.

To Dr. Cari Din and Dr. William Bridel, thank you for the passion, inspiration, and expertise you brought to this work.

I would like to thank my colleagues from the Relationships and Exercise lab, and the Dance Science lab for their willingness to discuss, offer feedback, and support me along this journey.

I would like to acknowledge the Brenda Strafford Centre on Aging, for funding my studies through the Barrie I. Strafford Master's Scholarship, as well as the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding this research through an Insight Development grant.

To my family whose support has been instrumental, and my sister Danielle who has been alongside me, (in a home that over the pandemic became our two offices, our living space, a dance studio, and a yoga studio) with endless hours spent together over the last two years, thank you.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my past dance educators and current colleagues who endlessly inspire me and demonstrate the way that dancing has a way to connect us beyond our words.

### **Dedication**

To the University Heights Dance and Movement program and participants, who welcomed me to your weekly class, and grounded me in the importance of this research. I will be forever thankful for Wednesday mornings spent dancing with you, your trust in me as a teacher, and your patience with me as a learning educator. Thank you for your openness, baking and gardening advice, and your endless inspiration.

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### Epigraph

*“But if experience has taught me anything, it’s that chasing youth is a losing proposition. There’s little benefit to looking back, at least not with yearning or nostalgia or any other melancholy humor. To look back is to cling to something well over and behind you. We don’t lose youth. Youth stays put. We move on... After all, I repeat, to move is the provenance of all living human beings. And by my definition, to move is to dance. With the time you’ve got, choose to make your life bigger. Opt for expression over observation, action instead of passivity, risk over safety, the unknown over the familiar. Be deliberate, act with intention. Chase the sublime and the absurd. Make each day one where you emerge, unlock, excite, and discover. Find new, reconsider old, become limber, stretch, lean, move... I say this with love: shut up and dance.”*

(p. 4-7)

***Twyla Tharp, Keep it moving: Lessons for the rest of your life***

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Problem Statement

The number of older adults in Canada is increasing (Bohnert et al., 2015), highlighting the need to identify and understand programming which supports aging. In particular, the benefits of physical activity for older adults are well established (World Health Organization, 2015), emphasizing the need to explore physical activity programming that supports this population. Dancing, as both a physical and artistic activity, has the potential to support multidimensional aspects of older adults' lives.

### 1.2 Community Dance

This research focuses on community dancing. Dancing is a physical activity which involves artistry and expression, movement to music (Ya, 2016), and can occur with others. Although the definition of community dance is evolving, it generally focuses on non-professional dance participants led by a dance artist, considers the social and relational opportunities of dancing, and welcomes those of diverse and varied backgrounds to engage in a positive dancing opportunity (Amans, 2017a; Houston, 2017). *People Dancing*, a leading community dance organization, offers the following definition:

Community dance is about community dance artists working with people... [it] is determined by: The contexts in which it takes place (where, with whom and why).

Approaches to dance practices that are informed by a set of beliefs and philosophies. The values that it embodies and promotes. (Amans, 2017a, p. 4)

Community dance is a form of physical activity that welcomes people of all abilities and attends to the social connection experiences that can be offered in conjunction with physical activity (Amans, 2017a; Houston, 2017).

### **1.3 Research Purpose**

The objective of this instrumental case study (Stake, 2005) was to understand from both the perspective of an instructor and dance participants the way that community dance may offer multidimensional benefits to older adults. This research also explores pedagogical behaviors that may support older adults participating in community dance.

### **1.4 Research Rationale**

Dancing has the potential to support multiple dimensions of well-being associated with aging; however, limited research has explored older adult dance participation using a holistic lens. This thesis aims to address this gap.

### **1.5 Study Objectives**

The objectives of this thesis are to:

- (1) Identify pedagogical practices that a community dance instructor perceives as supportive to older adults participating in dancing.
- (2) Explore a dance instructor's perspective on how a community dance class can influence older adults' successful aging, physical literacy, and embodiment.
- (3) Explore older adults' perspectives on the way that participation in a weekly community dance class can support successful aging, physical literacy, and embodiment.

### **1.6 Thesis Format**

This instrumental case study (Stake, 2005) explored one specific older adult dance class. This case was studied from both the instructor and participant perspectives to contribute to improved understanding of community dance for older adults more broadly.

Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework of this thesis, defines key concepts, and reviews literature regarding physical activity and older adults, the benefits of art participation

and dancing, the role of dance instructors, and dance pedagogy literature. Chapter 3 is a manuscript currently in review with *Research in Dance Education*, titled “*Promoting wellness, having fun, and creating community*”: *A dance instructor’s pedagogical practices and perspectives on the influence of community dance classes for older adults*. Chapter 4 is another manuscript which has been submitted to *Activities, Adaptation and Aging*, titled *Movement, music, and connection: Older adults’ experiences of community dance*. Chapter 5, the discussion, highlights the novel findings this thesis adds to existing literature on community dance for older adults, and identifies the theoretical, practical, and policy implications of this research. Lastly, Chapter 6 offers future research directions and concluding thoughts.

### **1.7 Researcher Role**

Throughout this research, I played numerous roles relevant to the case. Firstly, I began attending the in-person dance class from January 2020 to March 2020, to gain greater insight about the case. As a researcher I then conducted interviews for the Chapter 3 & 4 studies. Data collection for these studies began in Summer 2020. When classes were delivered asynchronously, I viewed class material to support research not included in this thesis. In Spring 2021, I then participated in the synchronous dance classes and provided technical support during the class. Lastly, I also instructed the dance class throughout Fall 2021, after all data collection was completed, and manuscript writing was in progress.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

This thesis was guided by three theories: successful aging theory (Rowe & Kahn, 1997), physical literacy theory (Whitehead, 2010a, 2019b) and dimensions of embodiment (Svendler Nielsen, 2015). These three theories offered a framework to understanding how dancing can impact older adults' aging journeys, physical activity experiences, and embodiment.

#### 2.1.1 *Successful Aging*

Successful aging theory (Rowe & Kahn, 1997) offers a strengths-based approach to aging, identifying three domains which contribute to aging well: avoiding disease and disability, maintaining cognitive and physical function, and engagement with life (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). Engagement with life involves both interpersonal relationships and participation in productive activities (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). Stowe and Cooney (2015) further developed successful aging theory by taking a life course perspective that acknowledges aging is a lifelong process influenced by lived experience and social structural factors that are not necessarily under an individual's control (Stowe & Cooney, 2015).

#### 2.1.2 *Physical Literacy*

Successful aging theory highlights the importance of engagement in productive activities, including physical activity. Physical literacy offers a compatible strengths-based, psycho-social, person-centered conceptualization of physical activity experiences (Whitehead, 2010a). Physical literacy is defined "as appropriate to each individual's endowment... the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to maintain physical activity throughout the lifecourse" (Whitehead, 2010a, pp. 11-12). Physical literacy theory also takes a life course

perspective, understanding the physical literacy journey as lifelong (Almond, 2010; Whitehead, 2010a, 2019c).

Physical literacy theory is grounded in existentialism, phenomenology, and monism (Whitehead, 2010b). Existentialism holds that individuals are influenced and developed through interactions with the world, and phenomenology articulates that meaning is created by individuals based on past experience (Durden-Myers et al., 2020; Whitehead, 2010b). This thesis in particular focuses on monism, which assumes that the mind and body are an integrated whole, rather than separate entities (Whitehead, 2010b). The integrated mind-body and embodied knowledge are essential to the human experience (Durden-Myers et al., 2020; Whitehead, 2010b).

### ***2.1.3 Dimension of Embodiment***

Embodiment highlights how the physical body is the convergence where people experience, express, understand, and interpret knowledge (Durden-Myers et al., 2020). Embodiment suggests that experiences of our physical forms are essential to our knowledge (Freiler, 2008). Svendler Nielsen's (2015) dimensions of embodiment conceptualizes six domains of embodiment relevant to movement and dance: creative, kinaesthetic, relational, physical, symbolic, and artistic (Svendler Nielsen, 2015). Individuals can vary in their level of development in each dimension based on their history with experiences aligning with each domain (Svendler Nielsen, 2015). Physical activity experiences can be designed to address specific domains (Svendler Nielsen, 2015). Community dance engages the body in an experience with the potential to be tailored to address numerous domains of embodiment, given it is both a performance and physical activity.



### ***2.1.4 Summary of Theories***

These three theories used together offer the opportunity to holistically examine the benefits of dancing. Research in this field has primarily focused on the way in which dancing offers the opportunity to support the first two dimensions of successful aging. By using successful aging theory, we acknowledge the important role that physical and cognitive health plays in one's aging journey, but aim to further current research by examining the third pillar of this framework, engagement with life (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). This thesis will examine how participating in meaningful activities that offer opportunities for social connection may also positively contribute to one's life. Successful aging does not offer a way to conceptualize physical activity, therefore, physical literacy theory was included. Physical literacy theory views that physical activity engagement is possible throughout the lifecourse, and at any endowment (Whitehead, 2010a). This challenges successful aging, which prioritizes physical and mental and health as a necessity for aging successfully (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). Lastly, Svendler Nielsen's (2015) conceptualization of embodiments considers the physical activity aspect of dancing, while also acknowledging the artistic side, specifically through the artistic and creative dimensions outlined in this theory, and therefore useful in examining dance.

## **2.2 Literature Review**

### ***2.2.1 Physical Activity Supports Health for Older Adults***

Physical activity improves physical capacities; reduces risk of disease, including dementia and stroke; and increases ability to maintain functional independence among older adults (World Health Organization, 2015; Tremblay et al., 2011). Physical activity is positively associated with psychological factors including self-efficacy, physical self-esteem, positive affect, and quality of life among older adults (Elavsky et al., 2005; Rejeski & Mihalko, 2001) and is also positively associated with successful aging (Baker et al., 2009). While there are many benefits of physical activity for older adults, limited research explores pleasure and embodiment in relation to physical activity for older adults (Phoenix & Orr, 2014). Further investigation is needed to explore physical activities that older adults are motivated to participate in and find pleasure and joy participating in.

### ***2.2.2 Dance as an Enjoyable Physical Activity Experience***

Dancing provides several health benefits for older adults, some of which are similar to those obtained from other forms of physical activity, and some of which may be fostered particularly well through dance participation. Older adults specifically identified the physical benefits dancing can offer (Quiroga Murcia et al., 2010). Participation in creative dancing for 24 weeks resulted in improved muscular strength, aerobic endurance, motor agility, dynamic balance, and flexibility for older adult women (Cruz-Ferreira et al., 2015). Older adults participating in line dancing demonstrated improvements in lower extremity function, gait speed, and endurance following twice weekly classes for eight weeks (Bennett & Hackney, 2018). Older adults with extensive past dance participation demonstrate better posture and balance than a control group without previous dance or sport participation (Kattenstroth et al., 2010). Dancing

may also support balance and decrease falls in older adults (Malkogeorgos et al., 2011). Older adult males experiencing heart failure who participated in a traditional Greek dance class demonstrated similar improvements in functional capacity and cardiopulmonary testing as those who participated in an exercise regime, but had significantly higher intrinsic motivation (Kaltsatou et al., 2014). This collection of research findings suggests dancing offers numerous physical health benefits for older adults.

Community dance also has the potential to offer a pleasurable and joyful activity while supporting older adults' health, physical activity, and embodiment. Social dancing has been shown to provide physical exercise and fitness as well as being a positive and uplifting experience (Cooper & Thomas, 2002). Older adults in a hospital who participated in dancing experienced a sense of relaxation, improved mood, and dancing offered an opportunity to focus their attention on something other than hospital activities (Bungay et al., 2020). Dancing with others offers the opportunity to connect with others socially, to engage the cognitive and physical self, and be creative (Houston, 2017). Given this, older adult participation in community dance may offer an enjoyable and pleasing opportunity to participate in physical activity.

### ***2.2.3 Benefits of Art Participation***

The World Health Organization identifies five categories of art: (1) Online, digital, and electronic arts, (2) culture (e.g., including going to museums, cultural festivals, or live performances), (3) literature, (4) visual arts, design, and craft, and (5) performing arts, which includes dance (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Engaging in art activities can support health across the life span, play a role in the prevention and management of numerous health considerations, support well-being, decrease the risk of frailty and support cognitive health (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Art offers opportunities to be mentally challenged, focus, experience a sense of calm, and

may promote relaxation (Cantu & Fleuriel, 2018; Flood & Phillips, 2007). Aesthetic experiences can offer meaningfulness to one's life, and provide opportunities for social connection, and therefore support one's aging journey (Wikström, 2004). Art participation can also positively contribute to mental wellness, therefore also supporting successful aging (Cantu & Fleuriel, 2018).

Social wellness can also be supported through art participation. Older adults living in care homes demonstrated improved confidence, strengthened relationships, and new friendships following participation in dance, orchestral music, or reminiscence arts (Dadswell et al., 2020). Art participation can also foster community among residents of a care home (Dadswell et al., 2020). Artistic activities present opportunities to be in a group with others, receive support from others, and decrease loneliness (Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Flood & Phillips, 2007; Noice et al., 2014). Dancing is one type of performing art (Fancourt & Finn, 2019) with the potential to support older adults in numerous aspects of their lives.

#### ***2.2.4 Effects of Dancing on Embodiment***

Community dance has potential to influence one's embodiment. Older adults who participated in a creative dance workshop became more aware of the interconnectedness of their mind and body and were able to connect to memories through dancing (Thornberg et al., 2012). Furthermore, older adult participants of a four-part community dance workshop experienced improved body awareness, greater comfort in dance creation, and willingness to engage in touch (e.g., hug, pat on the back) with others (Hansen et al., 2021). Participation also resulted in long term improvements in body appreciation (Hansen et al., 2021). Adolescents and young adults identified recreational community dance supported them being comfortable when close to others, and to feel a connection to others or culture (Gardner et al., 2008). Adults aged 18-74 years who

participate in amateur dancing identified that dancing helped them to be “in harmony with oneself” (Quiroga Murcia et al., 2010). Dancing has the potential to impact numerous aspects of embodiment yet more research is needed to fully understand the multiple ways community dance can support older adults’ embodiment.

### ***2.2.5 The Role of Dance Instructors***

The critical role that instructors play in a physical activity experience is recognized in both physical literacy and dance pedagogy literature (Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010; Whitehead, 2010c). Dance instructors are role models for participants (Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010). Community dance instructors in particular have a multifaceted role while instructing classes that involves balancing the needs of partners and participants (Amans, 2017b). Community dance instructors are required to have numerous skills and competencies including being organized, creative, able to develop person-centred programming, engaged in inclusive practices, and able to manage individual and collective needs (Amans, 2017b). Dance instructors play an essential role in a dancing experience, and research which explores pedagogical choices and their influence on class is needed (Schwender et al., 2018). Findings which explore dance instructors’ perspectives remain limited.

### ***2.2.6 Dance Pedagogy Practices for Older Adults***

Older adult dancers are often overlooked in dance pedagogy research. Brodie and Lobel (2016) provide recommendations on how to adapt dance classes for mature movers, however they define “mature” as those above the age of 30. There is a need to expand dance pedagogy research to include those across the lifespan. Current dance research and pedagogy literature about older adults is also concentrated on accommodating the physical declines of aging (Brehm & McNett, 2015; Quin et al., 2015). Dance pedagogy for older adults must advance to consider

how dance instructors can empower older adults to have positive and meaningful experiences of activity when dancing. Creative dance is a highly adaptable form of dance, and therefore offers a promising context for developing dance pedagogy for older adults (Brehm & McNett, 2015).

Brain-compatible dance (Gilbert, 2006, 2019) is a teaching methodology rooted in creative dance which can be adapted across dance disciplines. Key to this teaching methodology is creating holistic learning opportunities which engage numerous parts of the brain (Gilbert, 2019). There are ten key principles of instruction in brain-compatible dance: (1) present a meaningful curriculum, (2) provide an enriched environment, (3) give meaningful feedback, (4) include opportunities for emotional engagement, (5) encourage social interaction, (6) present a developmentally appropriate curriculum, (7) alternate teacher-directed and student-centered activities, (8) provide both novel and repetitious experiences, (9) offer a curriculum that is holistic and sequential, and (10) provide information about nutrition and sleep (Gilbert, 2019). This approach also provides a five-part outline to guide lessons: (1) warming up, (2) exploring the concept, (3) developing skills, (4) creating, and (5) cooling down (Gilbert, 2019). The warm-up, titled ‘the BrainDance’ is based on Bartenieff Fundamentals (Hackney, 2002) and moves sequentially through eight movement patterns: breath, tactile, core-distal, head-tail, upper-lower, body-side, cross lateral, and vestibular (Gilbert, 2019). These patterns reflect developmental movement patterns (Gilbert, 2019). The BrainDance is intended to support integration of these movements, and prepare the brain for optimal learning (Gilbert, 2019). Another key aspect of brain-compatible dance are the 15 movement concepts: place, size (range), level, direction, pathway, focus, speed, rhythm, energy (dynamics, qualities), weight, flow, body parts, body shapes, relationship, and balance (Gilbert, 2019). These concepts allow participants to find contrasting and varied movement, and allows for conceptual movement exploration (Gilbert,

2019). Brain-compatible dance offers a dance pedagogy approach that considers and encourages dancing participation for all abilities and ages (Gilbert, 2019), therefore an appropriate dance pedagogical approach to explore.

### **2.3 Purpose**

Dancing has potential to impact numerous aspects of well-being, but much of the prior literature has focused on the physical domain. Limited research simultaneously considers the physical *and* artistic aspects of community dance participation for older adults. A recent review examining dance supporting health and wellness identified future research should focus on creativity and embodiment (Chappell et al., 2021), both which are considered in this study. Fortin (2018) also identifies the need for dance research to clearly describe the dancing experience, and pedagogical approaches used, which dance instructors can offer insight into. Dance literature in this area demands a need for the holistic examination of dancing, which thoroughly explains the dancing experience and pedagogical approaches. Therefore, the purpose of this case study was to investigate older adults' lived experiences and instructors' perspectives and practices in community dance classes, and how those experiences contribute to successful aging, physical literacy, and embodiment.

**Chapter 3: “Promoting wellness, having fun, and creating community”: A dance instructor’s pedagogical practices and perspectives on the influence of community dance classes for older adults**

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This work was supported by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada under Grant 403-2019-00378 and the Brenda Strafford Centre on Aging through the Barrie I. Strafford Master’s Scholarship.

This work was presented at the 13th Annual Conference of Healthy Dancer Canada held online, November 2021.

Acknowledgements: We would like to thank the University Heights Dance and Movement program for their support and participation in this dance research. Additionally, we hold much gratitude for Dr. William Bridel and his expert contribution to the refinement of this manuscript.



### **3.1 Abstract**

Canada's aging population highlights the critical need to identify physical activity programming that has the potential to positively contribute to one's aging journey. Dancing is one type of physical activity that can offer the opportunity to be with others, move to music, and encourage creativity and personal expression. Dance instructors may influence older adults' experiences with, and outcomes following, participation in dance classes. This study examined the pedagogical practices of an instructor with extensive experience teaching community dance classes for older adults, and their perspectives on participant experiences and outcomes through the lens of successful aging, physical literacy, and embodiment theories. The dance instructor participated in three semi-structured interviews over a 10-month period. Utilizing reflexive thematic analysis, four themes were generated: (1) the coffee and cookies might be the most important part, (2) everyone can walk away feeling successful at something, (3) a space where class attendees can be creative and expressive, and (4) supporting physical, emotional, and psychological needs. Dancing is a physical and performative activity that can positively contribute to various aspects of one's aging and physical activity journey when instructors purposefully employ behaviors that consider multidimensional aspects of health.

**Keywords:** aging, dance pedagogy, successful aging, physical literacy, embodiment

## 3.2 Introduction

There is a growing number of older adults in Canada (Bohnert et al., 2015), highlighting the need for programs which support this population. The benefits of physical activity for older adults are vast, yet half of Canadians between the ages of 50 and 79 years are inactive (Azagba & Sharaf, 2014; World Health Organization, 2015). Given the benefits of physical activity in combination with the social and creative opportunities that dancing offers, there is considerable potential for dance to support healthy aging. Dancing is an aesthetic and expressive physical movement form (Durden-Myers et al., 2018). Community dance, although having an evolving definition, has been defined by People Dancing:

Community dance is about community dance artists working with people... [it] is determined by: The contexts in which it takes place (where, with whom and why).

Approaches to dance practices that are informed by a set of beliefs and philosophies. The values that it embodies and promotes. (Amans, 2017a, p. 4)

Dance instructors offer an important perspective on how dance classes influence participants because they can speak to the behaviors they observe and practices they utilize. Our research study will examine the pedagogical practices of a dance instructor with extensive experience teaching a community dance class for older adults, and their perspectives on ways in which participating in a weekly community dance class affects older adults.

### 3.2.1 Theoretical Framework

We approached this study using the lens of three complementary theoretical perspectives: successful aging theory (Rowe & Kahn, 1997), physical literacy theory (Whitehead, 2010a) and Svendler Nielsen's (2015) dimensions of embodiment. Successful aging provides a strengths-based perspective, viewing that one's aging journey is not only influenced by (1) avoiding

disease and disability and (2) maintaining high cognitive and physical function, but also (3) engaging with life, which highlights the importance of engaging in productive activities and social connection (Rowe & Kahn, 1997; Stowe & Cooney, 2015). These three dimensions of successful aging can all potentially be supported by physical activity, but successful aging theory does not include or provide a conceptualization of physical activity. Physical literacy theory fills this gap. Physical literacy is defined “as appropriate to each individual’s endowment...the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to maintain physical activity throughout the lifecourse” (Whitehead, 2010a, pp. 11-12). Physical literacy theory provides a useful framework for conceptualizing how physical activity contributes to successful aging. It considers physical, cognitive, and affective domains of physical activity and acknowledges the potential to be expressive, communicative, and empathetic through non-verbal interactions (Whitehead, 2010a, 2019b) Physical literacy theory also takes a life course perspective (Whitehead, 2019a) and is grounded in the philosophical foundations of monism (embodiment), existentialism (lived experience), and phenomenology (meaning; Durden-Myers et al., 2020; Whitehead, 2010b). This study delves into monism, which articulates the interconnectedness of the body and mind and that the dimensions of the human condition (e.g., physical, cognitive, affective) are interwoven (Durden-Myers et al., 2020). This conceptualization of self highlights that movement is the process through which we interact with the world, and that our bodies contribute both to our understanding of the external world, and allow us to express our knowledge and self to the external world (Durden-Myers et al., 2020). As such, we are exploring what it means to be embodied, to “engage the body as a site of learning” (Freiler, 2008, p. 49)

Svendler Nielsen (2015) provides a detailed, multidimensional understanding of embodiment as it applies to dance. There are six dimensions of embodiment: relational, kinaesthetic, creative, physical, symbolic, and artistic (Svendler Nielsen, 2015). Physical activity experiences can focus on one or more dimensions if specifically tailored by facilitators (Svendler Nielsen, 2015). Dance is an activity with potential to provide lived experiences and focus in all six of the embodiment dimensions. Collectively, this conceptual framework provides a scaffold for understanding embodied experiences in community dance classes for older adults, within the context of physical literacy and successful aging.

### ***3.2.2 Role of Instructors in Promoting Physical Literacy Among Older Adults***

Physical activity instructors hold multiple roles within their classes for older adults including: educating, establishing class culture, and promoting social cohesion (Harvey & Griffin, 2020). Having competent and knowledgeable instructors with expertise in both physical activity and gerontology, as well as providing individual attention and interest to those in the class, are important factors to older adult exercisers (Estabrooks et al., 2004; Harvey & Griffin, 2020). The personality of an instructor can also sway class attendance and adherence among older adults (Hawley-Hague et al., 2014).

Physical activity instructors can employ specific pedagogical choices to foster physical literacy. Whitehead (2019d) recommends four areas instructors focus on when leading older adults: promoting motivation, fostering confidence, maintaining physical competence, and encouraging knowledge and understanding. Cultivating an inclusive environment and acknowledging the wholeness of a person is also recommended to support older adults' health and physical literacy journey (Whitehead, 2019c). Facilitating a positive environment for class

attendees can be done through supporting individual autonomy and allowing participants to experience success and mastery (Durden-Myers et al., 2018).

### ***3.2.3 Pedagogical Practices in Dance***

Pedagogical practices used by dance instructors may contribute to facilitating embodiment, physical literacy, and thereby may support successful aging. For example, research identifies the importance of including both challenging and joyful opportunities in dance classes (Enghauser, 2003; Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010), which aligns closely with recommendations for promoting physical literacy (Whitehead, 2019d). Dance pedagogy research also emphasizes the importance of routine, and repetition (Gilbert, 2019; Morris et al., 2015) balanced with new movement experiences (Gilbert, 2019).

Limited research exists on dance pedagogy practices for older adults. Research focused on instructing this population focuses on mitigating physical considerations associated with aging such as offering seated modifications, utilizing structures to assist with balance, attending to physical safety, and providing an appropriate pacing throughout the class (Quin et al., 2015). Offering modifications and understanding the physiological changes associated with aging and their implications for dance have also been explored, but this research identifies “mature movers” as those 30 years or older (Brodie & Lobel, 2016) so is not focused specifically on the needs of older adults. While there is increased understanding of the health benefits and recommendations for older adult dance instructors to ensure participant safety, research exploring how instructors can facilitate physical literacy, and particularly embodiment, among older adults through dance has not been fully explored.

### ***3.2.4 Purpose***

The purpose of this study was to (1) describe pedagogical practices that the instructor perceives as promoting these processes, and (2) understand a dance instructor's perspective on how a community dance class can influence older adults' successful aging, physical literacy, and embodiment.

## **3.3 Methods**

### ***3.3.1 Methodology***

An instrumental case study (Stake, 2005) with a relativist ontology and a constructivist epistemology was utilized for this research. An instrumental case study allowed for detailed and prolonged engagement with one exemplary case that has the potential to provide insight into the research question and knowledge that could be applied more broadly to similar cases (Stake, 2005). A relativist ontology states that there are multiple, diverse, and varied realities (Lee, 2012) and a constructivist epistemology holds that individuals construct and create their knowledge, and are influenced by a variety of social, historical, and cultural factors (Creswell & Poth, 2013). These philosophical foundations value participants' and researchers' experience as well as subjective knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2013), aligning with the theoretical framework.

### ***3.3.2 Dance Class Context***

The case examined was a community dance class offered in an affluent neighbourhood in a large city in Western Canada. The dance class was developed in 2015 in collaboration with an academic higher education institution, a community association, and a local church. The goals of the class were to focus on body awareness, motor learning, rhythmic awareness and musicality, personal expression, and cultivating a community of learners. Class content was guided by Anne Green Gilbert's Brain-Compatible Dance methodology (Gilbert, 2006, 2019), an approach to

dancing strives to involve numerous parts of the brain and offer meaningful learning opportunities (Gilbert, 2019). Gilbert (2019) also presents fifteen movement concepts that are divided into categories of time, space, force, and body. These concepts focus on allowing dancers to engage in exploratory movement through ideas, rather than replicating a series of established dance steps (Gilbert, 2019).

The class is supported by a community liaison who assists with class organization and administration, and serves as a link between the instructor, class attendees, and the community association. Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the hour-long weekly dance class was offered from September to May in a church basement. Typically, about 20-30 older adults (hereafter referred to as class attendees), living within and outside of the neighbourhood where the dance class was held, participated. The class used pre-recorded music and included a 20-minute seated warm up, standing technique with the support of the chair, two to three class combinations, and a cool down. Class was followed by a social hour allowing attendees to visit and enjoy coffee and refreshments. The classes were conducted on a drop-in basis with a small fee (\$4 CDN) per class.

In March 2020, the dance class moved to an online format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pre-recorded YouTube videos of the instructor leading a class were emailed to class attendees for asynchronous dance learning. In September 2020, dance classes were suspended due to instructor's leave of absence. Then in January 2021, classes resumed online using the Zoom© virtual platform to facilitate synchronous learning and interaction with others. At this time, the class transitioned to a registered format, where class attendees paid \$60 CDN for an eight-week session. The structure of the synchronous classes was similar to those delivered in-

person. The Zoom© call was started 15 minutes before, and opportunity to socialize afterwards online, was also included.

### ***3.3.3 Participant***

The instructor of the community dance class was the sole participant in this study. They were identified as a valuable focus for this case study because of their extensive experience and insight into planning and teaching a community-based dance program for older adults, and their long, continuous relationship with this specific program and the older adult participants. The instructor is a mid-career dance professional who had taught the dance class since 2016.

### ***3.3.4 Procedures***

Prior to data collection, ethics approval was obtained from the academic institution's ethics review board. The dance instructor was invited via email to consent to participate in the study. The dance instructor completed three semi-structured interviews, approximately 90 minutes each. The first two interviews occurred in Summer 2020 following the delivery of the pre-recorded video classes. The third interview took place in Spring 2021 after synchronous virtual classes began. Interviews were conducted by the first and second authors, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

### ***3.3.5 Data Analysis***

NVivo 12 (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2018) was used for data storage and management during analysis. Transcripts were analyzed utilizing Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) reflexive thematic analysis. Analysis began with data familiarization, followed by initial coding where the researcher read and coded data expressing meaning relevant to the research question. Initial codes were grouped into preliminary themes. Themes were reviewed and named. The participant had the opportunity to review the transcripts, as well as provide feedback on the preliminary



analysis. The final report was then written, including descriptive quotations to support interpretations. Data analysis was performed primarily by the first author, while receiving feedback, and guidance from the third and fifth authors.

### ***3.3.6 Positionality***

The first author of this study identifies as a white cisgender woman in her mid-twenties and is a Master's student. She has been a dancer throughout much of her life, and a dance instructor for nearly a decade. This author previously knew the participant as they are both dance instructors working in the same city, but they did not have a direct working or personal relationship. The second author identifies as a white cisgender woman in her early-twenties and is completing two undergraduate degrees in dance and kinesiology. She too has been a dancer much of her life, and a dance instructor for the past five years. Both first and second authors' lived experiences of dance may have strengthened their ability to understand or relate to the experiences of the participant. The third author is a white, cisgender able-bodied woman in her 40s who is a kinesiology faculty member and has been highly physically active throughout her life but has minimal formal experience in dance. This author contributed strong theoretical understanding, extensive experience conducting qualitative research, and in-depth knowledge of active aging literature. The fourth author is a cisgender white woman in her 50s. She is an instructor in a kinesiology faculty with expertise in physical literacy, coaching and instructor behaviours, potentially strengthening the theoretical interpretation. She has over 25 years of experience as an athlete and coach in aesthetic sport that shares similarities to dance. The fifth author identifies as a cisgender, able-bodied white woman in her 40s who is a joint-faculty member in kinesiology and dance. She is a former contemporary dancer, and current dance science researcher and educator, and is a working colleague with the participating instructor. Her

lived experiences of dancing and teaching in a dance setting may have enhanced her ability to interpret and relate to the experiences of the study participant.

### ***3.3.7 Quality Criteria***

Quality criteria of this study were based on recommendations for reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) to address conceptual coherence; offer explanation, transparency, and high-quality analysis; and to indicate author positionality in relation to the research. The philosophical perspective of the study was consistently considered in the development of the research question and selection of analysis methods. The first author regularly attended the in-person and synchronous online classes during the study period to immerse herself in the case and provide context knowledge (Stake, 2005). Research team meetings, primarily with the third and fifth authors, and with the entire research team, allowed the first author to pose questions and receive feedback from all authors throughout, addressing the quality of the analysis process.

The first author also kept a reflexive journal throughout the research process, offering the opportunity for the researcher to reflect on their evolving positionality to the research, way they affected and were affected by the research, as well as review, revisit, and consider personal beliefs and biases (Given, 2008).

## **3.4 Results**

### ***3.4.1 The Coffee and Cookies Might be the Most Important Part***

Social connection and community were critical to the dance class. Social opportunities were important and motivated attendance. The instructor explained:

I've had some of the gentlemen come up to me and say, 'I don't know about all this dancing, but I'm coming for coffee and cookies and stuff,'... If it were a scale, I think the

two components [dancing and socializing] are, certainly equal, if not the social maybe even, bumping up a little bit.

The class did not initially include dedicated social time. This was added by the organizers at the church. The social time extended the class experience:

At first it might be that people only stayed 20, 30 minutes, and I was finding in the last couple years that it was at least 45 minutes... people stay and help with the cleanup, and I think that sort of feeds into that community feel as well.

Class attendees also started to show up early to socialize and help with class set up, emphasizing the social time as motivating class engagement.

The dancing offered opportunities to be with and relate to others. “Some people might perhaps have sort of established friendships outside of this class, ... but others I think, don’t necessarily see each other unless it’s in the weekly class.” The effects of the dancing extended beyond the class itself; “I think there’s a bit more community spirit ...neighbourly love and people checking in on their neighbours and, engaging with their neighbours.” The relational aspect of embodiment was highlighted, as the instructor explained a sense of togetherness, and “collective effervescence” at the end of class. Social interaction was included in the dancing itself:

We’ve done some partner dancing in the past where we’re connected via hands. The social dances or folk dances that we do, I’ve done them as a whole group in a giant circle or we’ve done lines, or a scattered formation, or groups of 4, groups of 6.

This allowed an opportunity for the physical and relational domains of embodiment to be developed simultaneously. Meaningful relationships were built amongst class attendees, and with the instructor. “I’ve really gotten to know people better. You sort of feel closer to them. But the

flipside of that again is that you feel almost more responsibility to do a good job.” The social hour allowed the instructor to learn more about class attendees. As the instructor knew the class attendees better, a stronger commitment to them, the importance of the class, and their role was highlighted.

Although the social opportunities the dance class offered were primarily positive and motivational for some, they may have also been challenging for others who did not feel part of the group. The instructor also identified a previous conflict amongst class attendees, resulting in an individual temporarily not attending class.

Online classes notably lacked social connection.

People were like ‘oh yeah this [the pre-recorded videos] is nice but it’s not the same [as in-person], it’s no substitute, it’s not the same as being together in person’... Just that sort of overall feeling of energy and togetherness, is a component that’s missing from that type of format.

Engagement in asynchronous classes declined over time. The instructor attributed this to not having social connection, highlighting how the social components motivated class participation: “Each sort of consecutive [pre-recorded dance] clip had fewer and fewer overall views, ... that social component is likely the piece that folx are missing out on.” The instructor personally identified they were less motivated by pre-recorded classes, “there was no reciprocal feedback or energy in the room...and so my sense is that it was maybe similar for folx at home, they were missing out on that collective experience as well.” Physical literacy emphasizes one’s ability to relate to others through physical expression. Asynchronous classes removed this opportunity, resulting in decreased motivation and participation. Having an opportunity to relate

empathetically and be with others through a shared, relational experience, motivated older adults to attend the dance class.

Synchronous classes were more similar to the in-person experience, providing some interaction but it was primarily between the instructor and class attendees, as opposed to amongst class attendees. “I think folx are happy to reconnect, and to, see some of their neighbours again, see some familiar faces, but we all acknowledge that it’s not quite the same.” Social interactions of the online synchronous class may have also been hindered as new participants may have initially felt hesitant to engage in the social time. The opportunity to be physical together and empathetically relational remained missing in this class format.

### ***3.4.2 Everyone can Walk Away Feeling Successful at Something***

The instructor consistently aimed for class attendees to experience success. Presenting multiple combinations each class fostered this:

I do find it’s helpful not to dwell on things too long, which is why I present so much different material.... my hope as well is that by presenting lots of different things there will be something for everyone to grab onto.

Dancing also provided opportunities for mastery: “We do a lot of step touches, and we do a lot of sways.... I think people who have been around for a long time can feel confident that they have mastered the step touch [laugh].” The repetition utilized by the instructor offered the opportunity to improve movement competencies, strengthen perceived abilities, and experience mastery.

Music allowed for a sense of variety when repeating the same movements. “Really trying to mix it up and use a variety of genres and styles, and appeal to everyone, hopefully.” Having the music change each week was “a worthwhile endeavour to continue trying to bring something

new and exciting and potentially touching, to the table every week.” Changing music maintained newness, while repeating movements supported mastery.

Combinations and learning steps seemed to provide feelings of mastery as well. “There’s really a lot of value for this particular group in feeling the mastery of learning a specific skill that I’m imparting to them.” Combinations progressed over many weeks “so that people really get the opportunity to, master it and to feel like, they’re really accomplishing something.” Mastering a skill or movement thrilled class attendees:

When they do master something that has been really challenging for them, they’re very excited to tell me about it.... like an air punch, or like a [woosh sound] in it, and a really sort of physical embodiment of their excitement that they’ve mastered it.

Developing new movement abilities offered an opportunity for older adults to see the potential for growth in their embodied form and mastery provided a sense of accomplishment for participants.

The instructor identified other considerations which supported attendees’ success. Firstly, was ensuring safety, which was greatly challenged in pre-recorded classes. Another consideration was regarding presenting class material, aiming to offer challenge without overwhelm:

I think I’m always trying to balance that sort of new skills development for folx who have been around for a long time, with awareness that dance isn’t easy and especially for this population where people are often very disconnected from their bodies and do not have a lot of body awareness. A lot of what I’m asking is really intense in terms of coordination. This ability to know and coordinate one’s body highlights how dancing may offer the ability to strengthen ones’ kinaesthetic and physical embodiment. The instructor promoted feelings of

success through offering reassurance, encouragement, and eliciting participants to have a growth mindset. The instructor offered group feedback, recognized progress of class attendees, and emphasized achievements, explaining “it’s not about pointing out what people are doing wrong.” The instructor aimed to develop positive experiences of physical activity and support feelings of success, encouraging continued participation.

The instructor constantly adapted the class for attendees and aimed to be inclusive, “for all different types of bodies, that might be participating,” recognizing individuals’ diverse endowments. The instructor intentionally left opportunities to be spontaneous and responsive to attendees, was guided by seeing the instructional needs of those in class, and determined class pacing based on attendees, but pre-recorded classes made this impossible. Seeking feedback and adapting accordingly was a practice of the instructor, but class attendees were often hesitant to share. In pre-recorded classes, very little feedback was received. Strategies for gaining feedback in the online synchronous classes included regular check-ins and offering opportunities to provide feedback outside of class, such as via email. This seemed to be more comfortable for attendees. In some cases, the community liaison shared feedback. It was important to the instructor to design a class attendees wanted to participate in. Fostering positive experiences supports continued participation in dancing, and potentially engagement in other types of physical activity.

The instructor made adaptations for online classes to support participants to continue experiencing success. In asynchronous classes the instructor kept a similar class format and included more repetition and focused on familiar movements. “I started doing a throwback exercise, ... my theory being that again, something familiar, something enjoyable and, you know if they’re already familiar with it, it might be a little easier to sort of pick up via the screen.”

Online classes may pose challenges in developing movement competencies and foster learning of the physical domain: “I was just really thinking about like maintaining skills as opposed to learning new skills.” The instructor aimed to be “energized but clear”, and easy to follow in pre-recorded classes. She also tried to predict challenges and provide guidance:

I’m sort of in my head as I’m, filming, trying to imagine how it’s going, and trying to imagine areas that might trip people up, or trying [to] imagine things that people might do that I could provide some feedback on.

Synchronous classes were challenging to gauge attendees’ success and lacked the ability for the instructor to physically relate to and understand attendees’ embodied experiences. The instructor identified concerns related to technology, but aimed to mitigate these, “I did have a couple of private one-on-one test Zoom© scenarios.” These challenges posed by online class challenged advancing embodied learning and supporting positive experiences within the class.

### ***3.4.3 A Space Where Class Attendees can be Creative and Expressive***

The dance class provided attendees an opportunity to be expressive and creative. The instructor utilized Anne Green Gilbert’s (2006) teaching philosophy which values creativity. “The important piece of this in terms of her philosophy is that you’re alternating activities, where the teacher is giving directions, and the participants are making choices,” allowing attendees to use their embodied capabilities to express themselves. Tasks to encourage and provide opportunities for creativity were chosen:

In the past as well, I’ve also done more structured creative activities. We’ve done some mirroring activities, ... I’ve done some shadowing and flocking activities. I’ve done some shaping activities [responsive static body positioning], either individually or in small groups



allowing attendees to connect to the artistic and creative aspects of their embodiment and express these through their physical domain.

Activities where participants lead others using their own movement, allow for a shared relational movement experience amongst participants. Other activities focused on making individual movement choices. One noteworthy activity included each class was where attendees passed an imaginary sphere of energy to one another:

The final sort of circle in our class where we do the passing, I would categorize this as the most creative and expressive thing that we do in the program. And it, it's a vitally important part of class for me, and I think it's also vitally important that it's happening right at the end of class. Because people have had the whole 55 minutes to get into their bodies, to get comfortable in the room, get comfortable with each other, and then they're ready. At that moment they're ready to be in the moment with each other and to find their own, moment of expression.

The instructor designed class to enable attendees to use their body to express their creativity and artistry.

Although numerous creative and expressive opportunities were presented, these tasks may have been uncomfortable for attendees.

I think I have to acknowledge that this is not a natural ask for a lot of people in this population, right. And so, in the past I've certainly felt some resistance when I've introduced these kinds of activities or ideas.

When integrating these elements into class "I feel like I'm disguising creativity and expressivity like a parent disguises vegetables." The instructor personally valued creativity and expression but acknowledged "I have to honor what feels best for them, and where they most gain their

sense of accomplishment.... I really try to organically weave in small opportunities.” These smaller, achievable opportunities seemed to allow attendees to be creative and expressive, without feeling awkward. This perceived discomfort reveals the creative and artistic dimension of embodiment may be challenging or unfamiliar for attendees to connect to.

Music may empower attendees to connect to the creative and artistic dimensions of themselves:

I think providing that new music, that ever-changing sort of playlist is something that I think can encourage confidence ...when there’s an emotional connection there I think, that can just make people feel really good, right? ... When people sort of do open up and feel more confident to be expressive, it feels good, right?

Creating an environment allowing for personal expression was emphasized: “a safe and comfortable place where perhaps new participants are, feeling comfortable to try something new...all sort of within this bubble of, of creating a nice community.” Online classes offered the opportunity for individuals to be creative and expressive without fear of judgement: “My wish is that people could, ... feel really free to experiment and to play and just be free. Because no one’s there, no one’s watching.” Without the relational aspect of the class, the instructor hoped attendees felt more comfortable exploring other aspects of their embodiment. Connecting to the creative and artistic parts of one’s embodiment may have been challenging or unfamiliar for attendees, but through employing intentional pedagogical choices, the instructor encouraged exploration into these domains.

#### ***3.4.4 Supporting Physical, Emotional, and Psychological Needs***

The instructor saw class supporting attendees’ needs, “Whether that was a need for exercise, or a need for community, or whatever folk’s individual needs were, my sense is that,

even though things are different [with online classes], we're still you know somehow filling a gap." The dance class was created out of a need, "because community surveys found that a lot of people, were feeling really isolated." The instructor perceived class as important to attendees, based on their continued participation.

The class focus, and goals of the instructor focused on the promotion of holistic health and supporting older adults in their aging journey: "... our main goals are centered around promoting wellness, having fun, and creating community." Class material aligned with this goal:

I'm utilizing a lot of these brain-compatible dance techniques and concepts [from Anne Green Gilbert]... there's a lot of thought and science behind why we're doing it, and doing it in particular ways. That, you know, I believe will support brain health, and healthy aging.

The instructor's aim to not only support physical health but promote embodied and holistic health aligns with physical literacy principles.

Dancing provided an opportunity for class attendees to connect to themselves and learn more about their embodied form.

I feel like so many people go through life up here [indicating to head] and they don't connect to their bodies in any sort of tangible way. And I think that's so important as we age, right? To sort of be in touch with how things are feeling, and how things are moving, and especially as balance starts to become a concern. So, I think that body awareness piece is extremely valuable, that people take away with them outside of class.

The instructor considered attendees' embodiment, and intentionally included opportunities to work on balance. The instructor also identified that class attendees acknowledged dancing

offered an opportunity for physical exertion and impacted their physical fitness, and therefore supporting physical function.

Autonomy, as a basic psychological need (Deci & Ryan, 2000), was supported in the dance class. The instructor utilized language promoting individual choice. “I’m using phrases like, you don’t have to copy me, use your own ideas, use your own shapes, make your own choices.” Modifications were offered and encouraged.

‘This is a good option here,’ ‘this is a good choice for you,’ ‘do what feels good for you in your body today,’ ‘I’m gonna do this and you can interpret that however you want, whatever that means for you.’

Perfection was not the goal of the class, “I kind of just say, you know ‘all variations are welcome’ [and] if you’re derailing, you know, go with it.” This teaching approach acknowledges individuality and honors differing abilities. Some attendees would uptake modifications and adapt class to their needs during in-person classes, but the instructor conversely explained, “I don’t know how often the people who need to are taking on those modifications. I find that this is a group that will copy everything that I do, unless I specify.” The instructor aimed to support autonomy, yet these opportunities were only sometimes embraced. The instructor capitalized on opportunities to support autonomy in asynchronous classes:

I kind’ve tried to encourage folx who might be using these videos at home to take charge, because they have the power to stop and rewind or fast-forward and redo and, do whatever they need to do at their own pace, allowing class attendees to take class use the videos in a way that is best for them.

The dance class also addressed social and emotional needs. Class attendees showed enjoyment in class and expressed feeling good after dancing. “Comments like ‘oh you know, I

just feel better after class, you just feel good.’ That’s something that you know, we hear on and off, and that was something that I always heard from in-person classes as well.” Class may also help individuals through personally challenging times:

I think it does provide a place where people can, not necessarily escape, they can escape in our program if they want to, but it’s a place to cope if they need to as well...I definitely know of a lot of tough situations going on in peoples’ lives, but they still come every week, and they wanna be there.

Synchronous classes also seemed meaningful for attendees. “They’re a very committed group, which tells me that like I said a need is sort of being fulfilled.” The opportunity to participate in meaningful activities supports engagement with life, contributing positively to one’s aging journey.

Online classes posed barriers for those previously able to attend the in-person class:

I think this experience has confirmed for us that online delivery has definite barriers to entry for a lot of folx who were regular participants in our program. Whether those are technology barriers... Some people just don’t have the capabilities at home to join. Some people don’t have the space to join. So yeah there are definite barrier[s] so we know that the program as it stands is leaving some folx behind, unfortunately.

Online classes engaged individuals of a specific ability. “They were the ones who felt confident coming into class, ... they’re also confident using the technology, so I think in general the group that we have are confident.” Class supported those able to participate, but this format was not accessible to all previously able to participate in-person.

### 3.5 Discussion

Our study aimed to understand the pedagogical choices of a dance instructor teaching a community dance class for older adults, and understand from their perspective, how community dance supports successful aging, physical literacy, and embodiment of older adult participants. Pedagogical practices both in-person and online that supported physical literacy and embodiment are discussed. Findings identify how embodied learning facilitates physical literacy for older adults participating in community dance, and the way dancing supports one's ability to age well.

The social components of the class were important to attendees' experience of the dance class and provided motivation to attend. Previous research recommends instructors engage in communication with, and provide or plan social opportunities for, older adult exercisers outside of the class context (Hawley-Hague et al., 2016). The social time following class allowed the instructor to spend time and talk with attendees, hear feedback, and motivate class attendees. Our findings highlight the critical role of social connection in supporting physical literacy, through fostering motivation, and supporting the relational dimension of embodiment. The social connection of the dance class also then supported older adults aging, as a component of engagement with life is interpersonal relationships (Rowe & Kahn, 1997).

The instructor included multiple movement opportunities within each session. This teaching practice aligns with previous research which suggests that including multiple skills within a physical education lesson supports confidence and feelings of competency (Morgan, 2019). The dance instructor in our study offered opportunities for participants to be creative and make their own movement choices, but at times, they experienced apprehension and resistance to these activities. The instructor valued creative and improvisational tasks, and previous literature has demonstrated that offering opportunities for creativity and learner choice can support

positive attitudes towards dancing amongst other populations (Frömel et al., 2002). Despite these past findings, the instructor still perceived there to be resistance to these types of activities.

Pedagogical practices with potential to support embodied learning were employed by the dance instructor. The instructor integrated opportunities to focus on balance and body awareness. Intentionally including opportunities to focus on one's own body demonstrates that instructors can select tasks with potential to support participant's embodiment, specifically the kinaesthetic dimension. The instructor supported the relational dimension of embodiment by including activities or combinations where class attendees were in groups or faced one another, therefore bringing the social aspect of embodiment into focus. This strategy aligns with findings from Zimmer et al. (2021) who identified having participants physically close to one another or allowing ease in speaking to one another supported social interaction amongst older adult exercisers.

The dance instructor also focused on developing physical capabilities of participants, and therefore the physical domain of the self, by using repetition and ensuring opportunities for success. Striving to improve the physical domain was balanced with opportunities highlighting participants' abilities. Enjoyable and rewarding experiences of physical activity are essential to promote continued participation in physical activity (Whitehead, 2019d). Dance pedagogy and physical literacy both acknowledge the importance of class content being manageable to provide a sense of accomplishment or success (Durden-Myers et al., 2018; Enghauser, 2003; Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010), which the instructor thoroughly considered in their teaching practice. The instructor also offered opportunities to explore the creative and artistic dimensions of themselves through self-directed movement opportunities. Instructors can and must employ intentional

pedagogical choices to support older adults' embodiment, which may also positively contribute to continued engagement in physical activity and therefore physical literacy.

Our research offers novel understanding about embodied learning through online instruction. Embodied learning opportunities were present in both asynchronous and synchronous online class delivery. Without participants being physically together, there was decreased motivation, lost opportunity to empathetically relate to others, and fewer opportunities to develop the social dimension of embodiment. Recent research examining online exercise classes for cancer survivors also identified the decreased social benefits of synchronous online classes compared to in-person classes, including lost opportunities to spend time with classmates before or after class, or individual conversations with instructors (Duchek, 2021). Kosurko et al. (2020) examined an asynchronous pre-recorded dance program, where instructors identified the inability to see participants as challenging because they were unsure how participants were doing with the class material. Our findings suggest that without physically shared experiences, the pedagogical choices an instructor can utilize are limited, and opportunities for embodied learning are compromised.

Embodied learning offers opportunities to positively contribute to one's physical literacy journey. Dancing supported the physical domain, as well as presented opportunities for older adults to connect to their kinaesthetic, relational, creative, and artistic dimensions of embodiment. Barnett et al. (2020) examined performing art activities to foster physical literacy. Performing arts highlight the constant interaction between one's internal world, and the external world, requires being responsive to all things in the environment, and emphasizes the opportunity the physical body has in being expressive and communicative (Barnett et al., 2020). This opportunity to attune one's self to both their own bodies and the environment and others



around them can further embodied experiences, and strengthen physical literacy (Barnett et al., 2020).

We believe dancing offers compounding opportunities to support older adults' physical literacy given it is a physical activity, and performing art. Dancing engages the body in an opportunity to be physical active, and therefore experience the health promoting benefits of physical activity (World Health Organization, 2015) and therefore contribute to successful aging (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). Engaging the body in ways that celebrates the capacity of physical movement, and offering the opportunity to embody behaviors which support health and wellness positively contributes to one's physical literacy (Whitehead, 2010a). The instructor perceived dancing as meaningful to participants, and therefore supported engagement with life, the third pillar of successful aging (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). Dancing integrates the benefits related to physical literacy that performance/expressive arts offer (Barnett et al., 2020) while being a form of physical activity, offering an exceptional opportunity to foster older adults' physical literacy and embodiment.

This study provides insight into the pedagogical choices dance instructors can make to support older adults dancing, an area of limited research. Additionally, our study furthers knowledge about the holistic benefits dancing can offer older adults using a multidimensional framework that allows for examination of multiple aspects of the self. Our findings highlight the opportunity for older adults to continue developing their physical literacy, essential, as limited research examining physical literacy in an older adult population exists (Edwards et al., 2018). A consideration of this study is that only the dance instructor's perspective of key pedagogical practices is captured and therefore future research should examine how teaching practices are experienced by class participants. Findings were cultivated from interviews with one participant.

This approach allowed for a more immersive and engaged cased study, but future research should aim to include numerous dance instructors with diverse experience, training, and teaching methodology. Dimensions of embodiment theory (Svendler Nielsen, 2015) also offers an avenue for future research. While our findings indicated that dancing has the potential to support the physical, kinaesthetic, relational, artistic, and creative dimensions of embodiment, further research is needed understand the impact of dancing on the symbolic dimension of embodiment (Svendler Nielsen, 2015). A greater body of literature is also needed to explore pedagogical practices which support these dimensions of the self.

### ***3.5.1 Conclusions***

Our study highlights the importance of dance instructors who deliver classes for older adults. The participating dance instructor made thoughtful considerations, which strategically fostered multifaceted and positive class experiences. Designing and instructing classes that not only focus on physical activity, but also consider embodied learning, and the social, emotional, and psychological health of older adults are key components to facilitating their embodiment, physical literacy, and successful aging. Dancing is a form of physical activity that with thoughtful planning and delivery can offer multidimensional benefits for older adults in various of aspects in their aging journey.

## Chapter 4: Movement, music, and connection: Older adults' experiences of community dance

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This work was supported by a Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada

Insight Development Grant 403-2019-00378 and the Brenda Strafford Centre on Aging through the Barrie I. Strafford Master's Scholarship.

This work was presented at the 2021 Canadian Society of Psychomotor Learning and Sport Psychology Conference, held online October 2021.

**Acknowledgements:** The authors would like to acknowledge the University Heights Community Association, the Foothills Mennonite Church, the current and past dance educators of the program, and the program creator.

#### 4.1 Abstract

This research explored how participation in community dance supports older adults' aging journey through a theoretical framework of successful aging, physical literacy, and embodiment. Older adults (aged 71-87) with experience participating in a community dance class completed semi-structured interviews that were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Six themes were generated: (1) *laughter, lightness, and feeling youthful*; (2) *the body comes back to life*; (3) *confidence can shine*; (4) *carried away by the music*; (5) *an opportunity to belong*; and (6) *contributing to the neighbourhood spirit*. Our findings suggest dancing offers multidimensional benefits which can contribute to healthy, active aging.

**Key words:** Dance, older adults, successful aging, physical literacy, embodiment

## 4.2 Introduction

Engagement in physical activity contributes positively to one's aging journey through supporting physical and mental health, reducing risk of disease, and meeting social needs (World Health Organization, 2015). Dance is a physical activity that is also a performing and creative art, incorporates music, and often occurs in a group setting. It therefore has the potential to provide benefits to numerous aspects of one's life (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Community dance offers an approach to dancing that invites participants of diverse experience, skill level, and background to engage their bodies in movement (Amans, 2017a). There is often a focus on togetherness and connection amongst dancers and with instructors (Houston, 2017). Older adult community dance classes offer an opportunity to begin or continue dancing in a recreational setting with others. As the Canadian population ages (Bohnert et al., 2015), activities that provide multidimensional health benefits must be explored. Dance is a multifaceted activity, with potential to impact multiple aspects of a person. Therefore, this study aims to examine how community dance may support older adults in their aging journey.

### 4.2.1 Conceptual Framework

To address this purpose, we used a conceptual framework informed by three compatible theoretical perspectives: successful aging (Rowe & Kahn, 1997), physical literacy (Whitehead, 2010a, 2019b) and embodiment (Svendler Nielsen, 2015). Successful aging theory takes a strength's based perspective on aging, and outlines three domains that contribute to aging well: avoiding disease and disability, maintaining high cognitive and physical function, and engaging in life (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). Current work with this theory takes a life course perspective, viewing successful aging as a lifelong process, and acknowledging individual experiences as influencing one's aging journey (Stowe & Cooney, 2015). Successful aging theory provides a

useful lens for considering the role of community dance in experiences of aging because it is well known that physical activity can reduce risk of disease and disability and cognitive decline, (World Health Organization, 2015) and it also highlights the important role of engaging in activities like physical activity for the experience itself, which is the focus of this study.

While successful aging theory provides a framework for understanding the importance of engaging in life activities, it does not provide a conceptualization of the experience of participating in physical activity. We therefore incorporated physical literacy theory into our conceptual framework because it provides a conceptualization of the physical, affective, and cognitive aspects of physical activity as experienced by people who are multifaceted individuals (Whitehead, 2019b). Physical literacy is defined as “as appropriate to each individual’s endowment...the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to maintain physical activity throughout the life course” (Whitehead, 2010a, pp. 11-12). Physical literacy theory is based on the philosophical principles of existentialism, phenomenology, and monism (Whitehead, 2010a, 2010b). Existentialism states individuals are developed and shaped by their experiences (Whitehead, 2010b). Phenomenology holds that meaning is developed and shaped by individual experience (Whitehead, 2010b). Embodiment emphasizes that we interact and communicate with our environment through and with our bodies, and that our bodies are integral to our interpretation and expression of our knowledge (Durdén-Myers et al., 2020). Embodiment suggests we are holistic beings, and our experience as an embodied self is essential to the human experience (Durdén-Myers et al., 2020).

Svendler Nielsen (2015) provides a detailed framework of six dimensions of embodiment that can be influenced through dance: creative, kinaesthetic, relational, physical, symbolic and artistic (Svendler Nielsen, 2015). While some dimensions may be more developed than others

for different people, all six dimensions are part of the self, and dance experiences can be designed to place greater focus on some dimensions than others (Svendler Nielsen, 2015).

#### ***4.2.2 Physical Activity, Dance, and Older Adults***

Physical activity can positively influence health and well-being for older adults, but participation rates are low and decline with age (World Health Organization, 2015). In Canada, half of older adults aged 50 to 79 are inactive (Azagba & Sharaf, 2014), indicating that physical health benefits alone may not be sufficient to motivate participation. Dance, with its unique blend of physical movement, music and rhythm, creative opportunities, social interactions, and cultural connections, may provide an attractive physical activity for some older adults. A study with people living with Parkinson's disease found that participants who were assigned to take tango dance classes had significantly more activity enjoyment compared to a control group who did not partake in tango, and over 60% of participants from the tango classes wanted to continue dancing (Rios Romenets et al., 2015). Furthermore, cultural dance, defined by the authors as "dance particular to a cultural or ethnic group that stemmed from the purpose of celebration" (p. 354) may attract those with negative perceptions towards physical education (Olvera, 2008).

The reasons older adults give for participating in dance go beyond an interest in realizing physical health benefits. Older adults participating in social dance identified the physical benefits of the activity, as well as the "uniquely positive experience" that dance offers as reasons for participating (Cooper & Thomas, 2002, p. 706). Adults' reasons for participating in an improvisational dance class/workshop included: having a previous passion for dance, learning about themselves, connecting with their body, and being in community with others whom they believed had similar ideals (Vergeer, 2018). Vergeer (2018) found that reasons related to health

and fitness were less common or subordinate to other factors. Dance may offer an avenue for physical activity for those who have not enjoyed other physical activities.

#### ***4.2.3 Dance and Physical Literacy***

Research has begun to explore aspects of physical literacy which can be supported through participating in dance. The benefits of dance primarily focus on movement competencies. For example, research indicates dancing improves balance (Alpert et al., 2009; Federici et al., 2005; Rios Romenets et al., 2015). Creative dance for older adult women improves physical fitness indicators including lower limb strength, aerobic endurance, and lower body flexibility (Cruz-Ferreira et al., 2015). Adolescents and young adults participating in dance experienced improved dance confidence, ability (Gardner et al., 2008) and improved self-esteem related to dance and other aspects of life (Burke et al., 2018). Although this research provides evidence that some aspects of physical literacy such as competence and confidence can be supported by dance, a more holistic examination considering all dimensions of physical literacy that is focused on older adults is needed.

#### ***4.2.4 Effects of Dance on Embodiment***

The research on dance and embodiment among older adults is very limited, but there are a few studies with other populations that suggest dance can be an important opportunity for embodied experiences. For example, those living with changing cognition who participate in dance may experience an embodied opportunity to express emotion (Chappell et al., 2021). For youth living in underserved neighbourhoods, dance offered an opportunity to manage emotions related to stress and hardship and allowed participants to express emotions they may find difficult to discuss (Burke et al., 2018). The relational aspect of embodiment was also experienced through opportunities to meet others, form new relationships, and to feel part of a



collective (Burke et al., 2018). This limited evidence suggests the potential for dance to support embodied experience.

#### ***4.2.5 Purpose***

There is a body of research suggesting dance has benefits for older adults that may promote successful aging and develop physical literacy and embodiment specifically. However, there is limited research that has focused on physical literacy and embodiment holistically, particularly among older adults. Furthermore, a recent review of research examining the benefits of dance identified a need for qualitative research that places dancers' perspectives at the forefront (Chappell et al., 2021). Given these considerations, the purpose of this case study was to examine, from the perspective of older adults, the ways in which participation in a weekly community dance class supports their successful aging, physical literacy, and embodiment.

### **4.3 Materials and Methods**

#### ***4.3.1 Methodology***

This study utilized an instrumental case study design (Stake, 2005) with a relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology. The instrumental case study design allowed examination of one specific community dance class for older adults with the aim to understand the psycho-social benefits of dancing for this population more broadly (Stake, 2005). Relativist ontology suggests that there are multiple realities that are subjective (Lee, 2012). Constructivist epistemology posits that knowledge is created through social interactions and are influenced by social and historical contexts, and that the knowledge generated through research will reflect the participants' and the researchers' interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2013). These philosophical foundations are aligned with this study's purpose to understand lived experiences of older adult dance participants, as they acknowledge that knowledge is subjective and based on lived

experience (Creswell & Poth, 2013). This philosophical perspective is aligned with the philosophical tenets of physical literacy and embodiment.

#### ***4.3.2 Class Setting***

This case study examined a weekly community dance class for older adults. The class is held in an affluent neighbourhood in a western Canadian city and was typically offered between September and May each year. Attendees of the class lived both in and outside of the community. The class was created through collaboration with a post-secondary institution, a community association, and a church which provided the location of the dance class. The class was led by a mid-career dance professional who had instructed the class since 2016. The instructor's teaching methodology followed that of Anne Green Gilbert (2006, 2019). This brain-compatible teaching approach utilizes strategies that create a rich environment in which the brain is "ready, willing, and able to learn." (Gilbert, 2019, p. 29). Key principles of this methodology include providing a meaningful curriculum that is holistic and sequential, creating a multisensory environment, providing meaningful feedback, creating opportunities for emotional engagement and social interaction, including both teacher-directed and student-centered activities, and balancing the concepts of novelty and repetition (Gilbert, 2019). These principals are woven into a structured yet flexible lesson plan that encourages movement exploration through fifteen Laban-inspired movement concepts (Gilbert, 2019).

The class format included an approximately 20-minute seated warm up called the *BrainDance*, consisting of sequentially moving through eight developmental movement patterns (Gilbert, 2019). Standing technique work followed, in which a chair was used to aid balance and offer support. The standing technique work included movements such as pliés, rises, retirés, and leg swings. The second half of class focused on learning movement combinations which were

progressively developed over numerous weeks. Combinations included locomotor and non-locomotor movements, shifts of weight and balance, and change of direction, and were inspired and influenced by the music and social dances. The instructor also employed choreographic principals such as repetition, accumulation, and retrograde in the design of class combinations. Class concluded with a cool down activity where participants stood in a circle, and each took a turn dancing with an imaginary sphere of energy. They then creatively passed this imaginary energy sphere to the person beside them. Following class was a social hour where participants had coffee and took turns bringing snacks to share.

The in-person class was originally run on a drop-in basis, with up to 30 participants attending each week. In March 2020, the in-person class was paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Five pre-recorded asynchronous YouTube classes were sent via email to class participants. All class delivery (online and in-person) was temporarily paused through Fall 2020 due a leave of absence of the instructor. In January 2021, synchronous online classes were delivered through Zoom© (Zoom Video Communications, 2021), an interactive format allowing live engagement amongst participants and instructor. Classes in the synchronous format required pre-registration. This class format included a short social opportunity both before and after (approximately 10-30 minutes), intended to reflect the social hour of the previous in-person classes.

### ***4.3.3 Participants***

Eligibility criteria included: 60 years of age or older, current or previous participation in the community dance class, and able to participate in an 60-90 minute interview in English via phone or online. Five individuals volunteered to participate. Participants were aged 71-87 years ( $M_{age}=76$  years), self-identified as female (n=4) or male (n=1), White (n=5), heterosexual (n=3)

or preferred not to disclose ( $n=2$ ), and married ( $n=3$ ) or divorced/separated ( $n=2$ ). Three participants were born in Canada, and two were born in another country but had lived in Canada for more than five decades. Most participants lived in a household of two people (80%), and one participant lived alone (20%). Participants all had at least some post-secondary education, children ( $M=3$ ), and none identified as a primary caregiver. Two participants earned a household income of \$80,000 or greater, and one earned a household income between \$40,000 and \$59,999, while two did not report income. One participant was working or studying part time, while all other participants were retired. Two participants self-identified as having a disability or chronic health condition. On average, participants self-reported engaging in 110 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity each week, 158 minutes of mild activity, 27 minutes of resistance training, and 29 minutes of flexibility training. Their activities included walking, swimming, dance, cycling, gardening/yard work, and playing with grandchildren.

#### ***4.3.4 Procedures***

Prior to study commencement, ethics approval was obtained from the institution's ethics review board. The first author regularly attended in-person classes for approximately a month and a half prior to the onset of COVID-19, and attended all of the interactive synchronous online dance classes, allowing for rapport building, and gaining a greater understanding of the dance class context. Participants were invited to participate in the study via short presentations during the dance class, and through email invitations forwarded to all class participants by the dance instructor. Individuals who wanted to participate in the study contacted the research team by phone, or email. Signed, informed consent was provided and a short questionnaire focused on demographic information and physical activity behaviour was completed via the online survey tool Qualtrics. Participants engaged in one semi-structured interview, scheduled at a time

convenient for them. Interviews were conducted by the first author either by phone or using Zoom© and lasted between 26 and 56 minutes. The interview guide focused on participants' experiences of the dance class (e.g., What are some of the highlights you have had participating in the program?), physical literacy (e.g., Are there ways in which you feel moving to music enriches your experiences in the class? Please tell me about them), and social connection (e.g., Is it important or meaningful for you that this is a group [class], with other people?). Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and all identifying information was removed and participants' names were replaced with their participant number. All participants were sent and provided feedback on their transcripts. A summary of the results of the analysis of their interviews was also sent to participants. Two participants provided feedback on the summaries via short follow up interviews (8-11 minutes), which were transcribed and incorporated into the analysis.

#### ***4.3.5 Data Analysis***

NVivo 12 software (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2018) was used to assist in data storage and organization. Transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019, 2021) reflexive thematic analysis. The process of reflexive thematic analysis began with data familiarization. Initial codes relevant to the research were coded and initial themes were generated. Themes were reviewed, named, and a final report was written utilizing quotations that highlighted participants' perspectives. Throughout analysis, the first author met regularly with the second and third authors who reviewed the analysis and posed questions and alternate interpretations for the first author to consider. All authors had opportunity to provide feedback on the final analysis.

#### ***4.3.6 Positionality***

The first author identifies as a 26-year-old White, able-bodied, cisgender woman. She is a dancer, and dance educator as well a current Master's student, whose research examines the way dance can support older adults' wellness. The second author is a former contemporary dancer who identifies as a White, cisgender, able-bodied woman in her 40s. She holds a joint position as a faculty member in dance and kinesiology and dance with a focus on dance science research and education. The third author identifies as a White, cisgender able-bodied woman in her 40s. She is a kinesiology faculty member with numerous years of physical activity involvement, but limited experience participating in dance. Her expertise lies in the psychosocial benefits of exercise, and qualitative research methods. The fourth author self-identifies a White, cisgender woman in her 50s. She is a kinesiology faculty instructor, and former athlete and coach of an aesthetic sport. Her expertise lies in physical literacy, coaching and instructor behaviours, and pedagogy. The fifth author identifies as a 34-year-old White, able-bodied, cisgender woman. She is a dance educator for older adults and people living with Parkinson's' Disease.

#### ***4.3.7 Quality Criteria***

Criteria for assessing study quality were based on recommendations for reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), which identifies two key considerations: (1) adequate choice and explanation of methods and methodology and (2) well-developed and justified analysis. The research methods and analysis process were clearly outlined. The constructivist epistemology was reflected in the research process, by including both common perspectives and opposing or variations on common perspectives within each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Quotations that provided rich detail and insight into participants' experiences were selected. The second and third author provided ongoing feedback on analysis, and all authors had the

opportunity to provide feedback on final themes. Reflexivity was addressed by the first author keeping a journal throughout the study to reflect on and document their interaction with the research and their interpretations, and consider/revisit decisions made throughout the research process (Given, 2008).

## **4.4 Results**

### ***4.4.1 Laughter, Lightness, and Feeling Youthful***

The dance class offered a positive physical activity experience that participants enjoyed: “It’s camaraderie, with the other folks that were there. It’s doing the exercises [that] is a lot of fun. I enjoy myself” (P5). The dance class resulted in improved mood, decreased stress, and feeling “refreshed and relaxed” (P2). Participants recognized dance supported their cognitive wellbeing. The dance class “encourages us towards lightness” (P2) and supported positive emotions during and sometimes following the class. “I think there is maybe an attitude change when you go someplace and listen to music. ...And I think that affects your attitude, if not for more than a day, at least during the time that you’re there” (P3). Another participant explained class was “a step out of all the other stuff we deal with” (P2), indicating class allowed participants to step away from daily challenges, and be carefree. Participants viewed dance as enjoyable and positively contributing to their emotional and cognitive self.

Participants were motivated and looked forward to the weekly dance class:

The opportunity to move to music, led by someone who has an understanding of music and exercise and then also the social aspects that come after the class. And both of those things make it worthwhile for me to return every week. (P3)

Some participants preferred dance over other activities: “I find that movement to music is much more inducive than making a space in my condo and just doing some exercises” (P4), and

therefore may offer an enjoyable experience for those have not found joy in other physical activities. Dancing offered opportunities to be expressive: “movements can be fluid, and there’s more space I suppose for some self-expression” (P4), therefore allowing them to connect to the creative and artistic aspects of their embodiment.

The dance class offered opportunities to be playful, youthful and laugh. Laughter was especially important when errors were made dancing: “It’s just a very friendly space, it’s like contra dancing, they say rule one is if you make a mistake, you laugh” (P2). Participants identified the class instruction contributed to their enjoyment: “We have an incredible instructor right now, that seems to understand and be aware of some of the interests and some of the restrictions of older adults.” (P3). The opportunity to connect to a younger, more playful self was offered through dancing:

There is a playful aspect which has not really been a part of my life since a very young age so, that’s kind of fun to cultivate, to see coming out of other people. We’re not [said mockingly] ‘second childhood’ but [laughs] we can play. (P2)

Opportunities to make movement choices were appreciated by participants: “we will be invited to fill the blank with our own expression, yeah, that does bring that playfulness too” (P2). The physical activity offered an experience reminiscent to experiences of earlier age, highlighting the way bodily experiences can connect to past experiences.

#### ***4.4.2 The Body Comes Back to Life***

Participants connected to their own embodiment through dancing: “I’ve done nothing for a couple of years, and so when she starts, I guess the body comes back to life or something” (P4). This participant found that by dancing, she was able to enliven her body, thus positively contributing to her motivation to be physically active. Dancing allowed participants to focus and



care for themselves: “I think feeling like you are doing something for yourself” (P3). Physical benefits of dance were also discussed. For example, one participant described “it [dance] helped after my knee surgery. And then my hip surgery too.” (P1). Another participant described “You’re moving a bit better, you’re walking a bit better because of the class” (P5) highlighting that dance supported physical function for daily life. Class participants felt dancing challenged their physical domain: “Well I feel that I expend a fair bit of energy during the class, and I think that’s a good thing. You work up a sweat, and you move around a lot, and, and have a good time. And I think that that’s a really positive thing” (P3). Participants felt dance supported their memory: “I brag to my friends that we are taking this brain renewal exercise [laughs] you know. ‘You skip something, you lost something, forgot your keys, gee you should come exercise with us’ [laughs]” (P2), acknowledging dance supported the cognitive domain of the self and therefore positively contributing to successful aging.

Participants were committed to their dancing. Some participants had attended the dance class for several years. One participant even explained “We went out of town for a couple of weeks, and I sort of missed it” (P5), demonstrating the way they found enjoyment and motivation to participate in the class. Participants desired to dance more or participated in other dance classes. Class also led to new opportunities: one participant began playing piano after joining the dance class. Another participant partook in “that national ballet event where we had the preschool and the seniors working together on projects” (P2) and auditioned and participated in a local dance performance. Dance was a meaningful activity, that at times led to additional new opportunities, therefore supporting engagement with life.

#### ***4.4.3 Confidence can Shine***

The dance class empowered feelings of confidence. Participants felt confident about their dance skill and felt they could succeed: “I am able to keep up with most of the dance steps...I feel fairly confident that I can do, or at least attempt to do [them]” (P3). Another participant even described “I know others are following me...it is a big boost to self-esteem too” (P2). One participant described their movement skills had “diminished greatly” (P4), but also saw dance as supporting her independence: “Well I know I can still do it [dancing] first off” (P4). Although this participant acknowledged their movement capabilities had declined, she still felt able to succeed in the class. Dance supported movement confidence beyond the class: “Dance has restored a bit of hope that, physically you’ve still got some ability” (P4). This participant was “...pleased to be moving again...and thankful that to my body that it will still move” (P4). The dance class allowed participants to feel confident and to appreciate their bodies.

Participants felt able to manage the skill level of the class. “I am able to keep up with most of the dance steps... both of the instructors that we have had have been able to gear the exercises and dance steps to our activity level” (P3), indicating the class offered a challenging yet rewarding experience for participants. Class was also feasible for a participant following a surgery: “The first time [the class] started I went to it... I had just had knee surgery, but I went anyways and I took my cane and I really enjoyed it” (P1). One participant described the relational embodiment in the class supported their confidence:

I think a benefit anyways in doing things with other people. And there’s a group feeling, isn’t there. It’s a bit like singing by yourself or singing in a choir. You feel much more part, and probably more confident if you’re in a group than if you do it by yourself. (P4)

This participant acknowledged the embodied experience of being with others was compromised online: “[It’s] not the same as being in a class with other bodies, but it is better than doing it by yourself” (P4).

Dance was also accessible when other physical activities were not:

P1: ... I would like to be really active, but I guess I am held back by some of my limitations.

Interviewer: And do you find that those limitations effect you in dance at all?

P1: Um, no I don’t think so. No, they might if I was getting on my bicycle or if I was trying run or go on an aggressive hike or something. Another thing is, that I’ve never been doing any floor exercises since I had my hip and knee [surgery] done. Like there is yoga and that. But yoga is not that easy for me to do.

Another participant discussed challenges finding physical activity they could do, given a medical condition, “I don’t know any sort of activity that I could do other than this [dancing] at the moment” (P4). One participant discussed prior to dance, “I had never ever joined an exercise” (P3). The class seemed to be an activity accessible to the varied endowments and experience of class participants.

#### ***4.4.4 Carried Away by the Music***

Music was transportive and critical to participants’ experiences:

I think being [able] to move to rhythm is an important part of coordination, and not everybody has it... And [the music], it’s an attraction. We are not going to bars, you know [laughs] we’re not hanging out looking for dance partners, I think the music is really part of the pull. (P2)

Music was motivating. “I think I just enjoy moving to music, and it gives you a beat, or a time to do things, and it also enhances your movement or interest when the music changes” (P4).

Hearing, and therefore sensing music may change the kinaesthetic expression of the body. Music can also influence participants’ mood: “I think there is maybe an attitude change when you go someplace and listen to music. I am particularly fond of music and of moving to music...It’s a happy place” (P3). Another participant described: “I think music and dance I find a link within my body or my mind...So I think there must be some connection there that, the music improves my movement” (P4), emphasizing that music helped participants connect to their own embodiment. Music contributed to the environment, and therefore embodied experience of the class.

Music enabled nostalgia. “*Walking my baby back home*, I hadn’t heard that for years... but I really liked that” (P1). Another participant enjoyed music reminiscent of earlier years:

She is very astute in picking music that is relevant to our age group. Which makes it even better... I enjoy moving to music, but I really enjoy moving to music that I can identify with ...we are all about the same age group so we all can identify with things like the Beatles, and whatever else was in vogue in the 60s and 70s. (P3)

Some of the music in class “is from our youth you know” (P2) and connected participants to a different time in their lives. The variety of music was appreciated: “I enjoyed it [the music] all. A good mix, good variation...I like the salsa, I like the music from other jurisdictions of the world, if you will. Or other areas of the world, it was quite enjoyable” (P5). This variety of music, some of which reminded participants of earlier times supported participants in having an enjoyable and meaningful physical activity experience.

#### ***4.4.5 An Opportunity to Belong***

The dance class allowed participants to feel a sense of belonging amongst class attendees.

It's nice to have a group to come back to, and it's nice to have a group that you can move with instead of explaining yourself. ... I sort of thought that's what church was for, ... I go to three [classes] a week and they [the participants] change often, this one doesn't, and it's a little different cause it doesn't. (P2)

The dance class presented opportunities to meet others and build new relationships. "There were certainly a number of people that I met in my age group and younger and older that I had never experienced before" (P3). One participant described meeting new people as they aged was valuable, "It's good to make other acquaintance because when you're in your 80s many of your friends die, and this is, a new opportunity to be a part of a community" (P4). Class offered the opportunity to meet and be with others.

Social opportunities of the class were emphasized: "This program is not just an exercise class, it also has the social aspect along with it" (P3). Another participant attributed the class thriving because of the social component: "Yes, I think that the social setting is important to the success" (P2). One participant described they had limited opportunities to be social, "it's seeing people that I know, because when you live in a condo by yourself, then you don't" (P4). The opportunity to dance with others allows development of relational embodiment. Online classes did not offer this same experience. "It [the pre-recorded videos] doesn't substitute for the actual class, because there is no socialization" (P3). Synchronous classes also lacked social opportunities. "While we've got Zoom®, it doesn't matter... nobody sees you [laughs]. You're all like little pictures it's so small. And it's not the same as being in a class with other bodies" (P4), emphasizing the embodied experience of being with others was not reproduced in online

classes. One participant explained “I was going to [do the recorded videos], but never did get around to it...I should be doing it” (P5). Without the relational aspect of the class, motivation was reduced. Some participants with experience in the in-person classes did not partake in pre-recorded classes; although class content was similar, the experience was not.

The class community cared for one another. “Oh, we encourage each other to go [to the dance class]” (P2). Another participant explained they are motivated by others, “because it [the group class with others] encourages you to actually do the activity” (P5). Classmates check on or follow up when not at class: “there is always, when you met them on the street ‘where were you?’ [laughs] That sort of routine” (P5). Participants perceived the group could be supportive through hardship:

I can’t say from personal experience that it has, that’s just my feeling, that it would be a place because it is an accepting place, without any demands. I think it would [be] good in terms of dealing with stress, or upsets, or changes in life patterns. (P3)

The community was inclusive: “... the level of acceptance is extremely high. I mean, quite frankly nobody cares whether you can dance well or not. You are moving to music, you are trying, you are having a good time” (P3). The age, or skill of others weren’t important.

“Everybody was various. I don’t know, you didn’t really know how old some people were. And it didn’t seem to matter, no” (P1). One participant discussed having other males in the group supported her husband attending. Another participant newer to the group described it as “really warm and welcoming” (P4). This group supported one another dancing, regardless of their age or skill level.

Some disadvantages of the group experience were shared. These included limited space, interpersonal conflicts, and feeling left out of the group. One participant discussed the way

“newcomers are welcome and vetted very quickly” (P2), but conversely one participant described their apprehensions joining this well-established group. “It makes you hesitant, because the other people know one another so well” (P4). Another participant described because they were not able to drink coffee at the social time that followed class, “I just feel like an outsider there” (P2). While the social experience was mainly positive, there were some challenges and social barriers.

#### ***4.4.6 Contributing to the Neighbourhood Spirit***

The dance class also had affects which were felt in the neighbourhood that offered the class. The weekly dance class allowed individuals to see those they live by regularly. “I think it probably adds value to the experiences as these actually are my neighbours, and I wave to them on the street certainly” (P2). Participants also “met a couple of new folks in the community” (P5), facilitating new relationships. One participant learned more about their neighbours: “I didn’t realize, well I guess, that we had quite so much diversity in the neighbourhood” (P2). Participants primarily saw one another during the dance class, “It’s nice to say hello to folks and it’s nice to talk to them on occasion, but it’s not as if they are best friends or anything” (P5), emphasizing that without the class, these social opportunities may not occur. Conversely some class attendees did see one another outside of class “there was one woman that I used to walk with occasionally during the week” (P3), indicating that the connections with class attendees may extend beyond the class, and facilitate older adults participating in physical activity with others beyond the class itself. Having the dance class in the community supported engagement in physical activity, and therefore supported their ability to maintain health and wellness.

One participant discussed a lack of community and connection in the neighbourhood. “We don’t see neighbors around here enough. [They do not] go out of their houses that often. So

that was nice to meet people, and then dancing too” (P1). Class allowed participants to connect with neighbours they may not see otherwise. Knowing neighbours and having relationships with those who lived nearby also seemed important to participants when they faced challenges. “We can share things, we can ask for help, we can, you know it’s nice just to chit-chat” (P2). A participant explained they can offer help to their neighbours:

It’s important to me to know that there is a group that they are involved in, that can be of some help to them if they need it. Our people are around and checking on the welfare of some of the older adults in this area. (P3)

Participants viewed the class as valuable, and some even suggested that other communities would benefit from a similar class.

The dance class was a community hub: “It gives people a chance to check in with each other and see how everybody is doing and check up on people that aren’t there. ... people share stories and jokes, and community information. So, it’s a sharing group” (P3). One participant described it allowed them to hear others’ challenges or experiences of aging: “Sometimes I can relate. Sometimes they are completely different than me and I think, ‘Phew’” (P2). Class allowed participants to speak to others about the neighbourhood and offered a space to discuss experiences related to growing older. Holding the class in the neighbourhood may support attendance. “It was also very close. It was half a block from my house. That was a factor as well. I didn’t have to drive anywhere” (P3). Participants joined the class after being invited or encouraged by others: “It’s advertised, and my friends go, the neighbours go. So a certain amount of peer encouragement” (P2). This encouragement emphasizes how participants were motivated by the relational opportunities the class offered.

Class offered the opportunity to be engaged and participate in the neighbourhood:



There was nothing in this community that is organized for any groups other than soccer for children. And I thought that it would be wonderful to be able to see some of the other people in the community that were in my age group...I just thought it was an important community activity that I needed to be involved in. (P3)

The opportunity to engage with her community was part of why the dance class was meaningful. The dance class occurring in the neighbourhood supported social connections amongst those living near one another, therefore positively contributing to the neighbourhood spirit.

#### **4.5 Discussion**

This research aimed to examine the way participation in a weekly community dance class supported successful aging, physical literacy, and embodiment from the perspective of older adults. Dancing offered opportunities to support factors contributing to older adults' ability to age well. The physical and cognitive benefits of dance have been well established (eg. Hwang & Braun, 2015; Keogh et al., 2009). Our research highlighted dance can support the third pillar of successful aging, engagement with life (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). Dance was a meaningful activity that also supported social connection. The social connection opportunities offered by the dance class were two-fold: firstly, class allowed participants to be social with a group they felt they belonged to. Similar findings have been reflected in square dancing which identified dancing offered an opportunity for older adults to belong to a group (Schneider & McCoy, 2018). Secondly, our findings highlighted the class offered an opportunity to build relationships with neighbours and contribute positively to the neighbourhood. A recent review paper identified dance can offer a sense of purpose to one's life (Chappell et al., 2021). Our findings further this knowledge, identifying the opportunity to socially connect with others may contribute to participants' meaningfulness of the dance class.

Community dance allowed a positive and uplifting experience of physical activity. This aligns with past research identifying dance offers a playful experience (Kontos et al., 2021). Our findings suggest positive experiences of dancing were supported by the use of music. Music was able to remind participants of the past. Choo et al. (2020) identified individuals with changing cognition were able to connect to memories through a dance class that explored concepts, gestural movement, and music. Participants of the current study appreciated music from their youth, which is reflected in the work of Priest and Karageorghis (2008) which identified choosing music from a time older adults could relate to was important. Previous findings suggest music may positively contribute to enjoyment and continued engagement of physical activity for individuals in a cardiac rehabilitation program (Bowles et al., 2019). Our study identified that music changed participants' experience of the class, and may offer motivation to attend the class, therefore supporting physical literacy.

Dance helped older adults connect to their embodied potential. Previous research identified that dance supports positive feelings toward one's own body (Sheppard & Broughton, 2020). Our research furthers this knowledge, demonstrating dance provides an opportunity to highlight abilities, and may offer reassurance of one's physical competencies. One participant described her feeling of competency, and even mastery, positively influenced her self-esteem. This aligns with physical literacy theory, articulating that those able to respond to the environment have greater self-esteem and self-confidence (Whitehead, 2010a). Some participants in the study identified they were unable to successfully participate in other types of physical activity. Dance allowed participants to be successful, regardless of their physical endowment. Previous literature has identified that contemporary dance can be adapted to accommodate varied abilities (Britten et al., 2017). Furthermore, older adult women participating

in belly dancing felt that despite physical limitations were able to dance, and that dancing supported the physical body (Moe, 2014). Our findings in combination with previous research, supports that dancing is accessible to those with diverse movement abilities. Regardless of participants' physical competency, dance offered a physical activity that they were motivated to engage in, and could feel confident participating in, therefore supporting their physical literacy journey (Whitehead, 2010a).

Community dance exposed participants to a practice that brought attention to their embodied nature and creative movement. Past research with older adults who participated in a creative dance workshop identified “a surprising awareness about the connection between body and mind” (Thornberg et al., 2012, p. 73). Our research suggests dance connected participants to their kinaesthetic embodiment, which may be enabled by music. These findings are consistent with older adult women participating in belly dancing, which reconnected participants to their own body and in some cases, their own sensuality (Moe, 2014). Participants of our study were also able to connect to their creative and artistic dimensions through their physical expression, when presented opportunities to choose their own movements. Dance allows participants to move with others, therefore supporting relational embodiment. Unfortunately, these relational opportunities were compromised in online classes. One's ability to relate to others through dance was observed among individuals with changing cognition in a long-term care facility, because dance offered an opportunity to be social and interact with others (Kontos et al., 2021). Our findings demonstrate older adults could connect to their physical, kinaesthetic, creative, artistic, and relational dimensions of embodiment through participation in community dance.

#### ***4.5.1 Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions***

A key strength was that this research was guided by a theoretical framework (Sheppard & Broughton, 2020). Another strength of this study is that we explained and interpreted the findings in relation to the experience of dancing (IADMS Dance for Health Committee, 2021), teaching methodology of the instructor, and setting of the research, therefore allowing a greater understanding about the dance class participants were partaking in (Fortin, 2018). Caution in the interpretation of our findings is necessary, given the study participants are not representative of the Canadian older adult population. A current gap in the literature is the underrepresentation of males, and culturally diverse populations (Sheppard & Broughton, 2020). Future research must address these considerations through study design and recruitment considerations. Future research should also explore dance styles other than Western concert dance to provide a greater breadth of knowledge in understanding how diverse dance forms may support the health and wellness of individuals across the lifespan.

#### ***4.5.2 Conclusions***

Findings from this research illustrate that dance can support older adults in numerous dimensions of their aging journey. Benefits of community dance supported physical, social and emotional health of participants, and embodied connection. Our findings highlighted the importance of creating spaces to engage in meaningful physical activity to support older adults being physically active. Neighbourhood classes allowed participants to stay connected and socially engaged in their communities while remaining physically active. Given these findings, future research focused on offering community dance opportunities within neighbourhoods to support Canada's aging population should be explored.

#### **4.6 Disclosure statement**

No funders had involvement with respect to design, data collection, analyses, interpretation, writing, or submission of this study. The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or financial involvement in any organization or entity with a direct financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in the article.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.1 Summary of Findings**

This case study explored an older adult community dance class and the impact it had on participants' successful aging, physical literacy, and embodiment from the perspective of a dance instructor and older adult participants. Pedagogical practices employed by the dance instructor were also explored. The dance instructor created opportunities for participants to connect to varied aspects of their embodiment, including their creative and artistic self. Older adults recognized that dancing allowed them to connect, attend, and care for their bodies. Findings also highlighted that participation in community dance created opportunities for older adults to socially connect with others, which the instructor perceived as potentially the most important part of the dancing experience. Social opportunities available in the class encouraged and motivated participant attendance. Music was recognized by both the instructor and older adult participants as an important aspect of the dance experience. This thesis demonstrates that community dance has the potential to support of older adults' embodiment, physical literacy, and successful aging. The opportunities for participants to care for and connect to their bodies, to connect to their embodied potential, and to be social when instructors facilitate classes which align with the wants, abilities, and preferences of participants contributed positively to these processes.

### **5.2 Building Connections with Oneself and Others Through Community Dance**

Findings from this research suggest participation in community dance allows older adults to connect to their own embodiment and build a sense of connection and community with others in the dance class. The findings also suggest a stronger connection with, and appreciation of the embodied self may support connecting with others. The dance instructor intentionally included

opportunities for older adults to focus on themselves and aimed to support participants' body awareness. Older adults identified that dancing encouraged them to give care and attention to themselves, fostering a greater embodied connection. This finding is similar to past research with older adult women participating in belly dance who experienced a strengthened connection to their physical body (Moe, 2014). Our study extends this idea by identifying ways that instructors can create opportunities for participants to tune into themselves.

Dance participation also fostered a sense of connection amongst classmates. Participants could connect physically when the dance instructor included group dancing opportunities. The experience of dancing together in a shared physical space was important to participants and was notably missed in online programming. The instructor aimed to develop a sense of community by including group dance opportunities, building connections with participants during the social hour, and striving to create an environment that was safe for exploration and creativity. Participants felt like they did not just attend, they belonged to the class, which is consistent with research identifying that dancing can help participants to feel like they are a part of a community (Burke et al., 2018; Moe, 2014).

Older adult participants were able to recognize their movement capabilities and embodied potential, aligning with past work identifying community dance supported older adults' body appreciation (Hansen et al., 2021). Similarly, improved body awareness has also been shown to relate to one's ability to be expressive through dance (Andersson & Ferm Almqvist, 2020). The group experience of dancing with others offered the opportunity to develop individuals' relational embodiment (Svendler Nielsen, 2015). Findings from this thesis, and past literature (Hansen et al., 2021) recognizes community dance offers older adults' opportunities for social connection. Our findings suggests that appreciation and awareness of one's embodied

capabilities may support individuals' comfort in connecting with others through physical activity. Further research is needed to understand the relationships between these concepts.

### **5.3 Creative and Expressive Opportunities Support Embodied Learning and Physical Literacy Among Older Adults**

Creativity is thought to positively influence physical literacy (Whitehead, 2019c), yet limited research explores this association. Movement of the body can tell stories, portray emotion, and communicate or connect with others and the environment. The ability to use the body to *speak* aligns with the work of Barrett and Winters (2013) who suggest the phrase “embodied communication” to conceptualize how physical literacy can be applied to the arts. Improvisation allows people to respond and react to the environment, and others in the environment (Marchant, 2016), while simultaneously expressing one's self. Findings from this research align with these previous studies — that creative and self-directed dance opportunities positively contribute to one's physical literacy (Whitehead, 2010a).

Recent work has begun exploring the relationship between physical literacy and creativity in the context of physical activity (Pickard & Maude, 2021). The authors suggest a bidirectional relationship — those with a strong sense of creativity will experience benefits to their physical literacy, and well-developed creativity will positively contribute to one's physical literacy (Pickard & Maude, 2021). Consideration of others within a space is an environmental factor which may influence physical literacy and creativity (Pickard & Maude, 2021), yet the social domain of physical literacy and the relationship it has with creativity has been largely unexplored. This research sheds light on the relationship between creativity and physical literacy for older adults. Furthermore, this study attended to the social domain of physical literacy and creativity. Engaging in creative and expressive tasks, especially with others offers opportunities



to develop one's ability to empathetically and non-verbally relate to others, and therefore foster physical literacy (Whitehead, 2010a).

Expressive and creative tasks in the dance class were perceived differently by the instructor and the participants. The dance instructor felt participants were resistant to creative tasks, while older adults indicated they enjoyed this aspect of class. One possibility for this difference in how creative tasks were perceived is that older adults who had particularly positive experiences in the dance class may have been more likely to participate in the research. Furthermore, some older adult study participants had past dance experience, which may have led to them having greater comfort with or willingness to engage in creative and artistic tasks than other class participants who may have had more limited dance experience. The instructor may also have more distinct memories or emotional responses to occurrences where participants responded negatively versus positively to class content. Alternatively, participants may have found the creative tasks challenging, which the instructor may have interpreted as dislike or lack of enjoyment from participants.

Our findings suggest that it is useful for community dance instructors to connect to their own creative embodiment to facilitate class. The instructor intentionally aimed to create an atmosphere which allowed participants to explore the creative and artistic aspects of themselves. Instructors play an important role in developing an environment which supports creativity (Richard et al., 2021). Teachers who actively engage in dance empower their students to be creative (Barrett & Winters, 2013). Instructors must also connect to their creativity to adapt and modify lesson plans to participants' needs and preferences. The instructor described how she tailored instruction to those in the room. This required the dance instructor to watch participants while instructing and make choices in the moment about how to adapt the class to the needs and

skillset of participants. Our study identifies that for older adults to have not only a safe but also positive experiences of dancing, instructors must be able to modify and adapt lesson plans for participants, requiring them to connect to their own creativity.

#### **5.4 Theoretical Considerations**

During the research process, the community dance class had to adapt and be modified due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This adaptation to required pandemic-related public health restrictions offered the opportunity to explore both online and in-person programming. A novel finding of this study was that the method of class delivery can influence experiences related to physical literacy (Whitehead, 2010a) and embodiment (Svendler Nielsen, 2015). When participants in a physical activity experience are not in a common physical space, the opportunities to develop the relational aspect of embodiment was compromised. Although Svendler Nielsen's (2015) conceptualization of embodiment is framed within the context of movement, this thesis also highlights that experiences that occur alongside or in conjunction with physical activity (such as the social hour which followed the dance class) can also influence one's embodied experiences. Lastly, this research offered novel contributions about self-perceptions of physical competencies. This thesis suggests that feelings of competence can be influenced by the specific physical activity experience and instruction. Participants at times identified movements or activities which were no longer accessible or achievable for them, yet all participants described feelings of competency related to the dance class. The dance class content was tailored by the dance instructor to the abilities of participants, which engendered greater feelings of competency among the older adult dance participants.

This thesis also provides insights into and challenges the current conceptualization of successful aging. Although Rowe and Khan's (1997) successful aging theory is widely used in

research with older adults, this theory implies that illness, or decline in physical or cognitive health inhibits one's ability to age successfully (Stowe & Cooney, 2015). This thesis emphasizes that participating in meaningful activities which offer the opportunity for social connection can positively influence one's aging journey. Meaningful engagement with life through community dance has the potential to positively influence one's aging journey, even if an older adult is facing illness or functional limitations. Furthermore, by utilizing physical literacy theory in addition to successful aging theory, one's embodied potential is recognized (Whitehead, 2010a).

### **5.5 Practical and Policy Considerations**

Findings from this thesis suggest that the inclusion of music, opportunities for socialization, improvisational movement, and repetition can enhance one's physical activity experience. Selecting music participants feel connected to may promote positive experiences and support creativity and expression. Instructors should actively strive to include music participants relate to. Instructors can reflect on participants' response to music used in class to inform music selections for sequential classes. Dance instructors should also create formal and informal opportunities for participants to provide feedback and suggestions on music used in class.

Dance instructors should intentionally include opportunities for social connection. This can be done within the dancing itself through including group dance opportunities, call and response activities where participants take turns dancing in partners, or include opportunities for participants to work in groups to create and choreograph their own movement combinations. Including opportunities for participants to connect socially before or after class is also an important consideration for instructors.

Improvisational movement can support creative and artistic embodiment. Instructors should intentionally include opportunities for older adults to engage in self-directed movement.

Exploring movement conceptually, a key feature of brain-compatible dance (Gilbert, 2019), offers one avenue to facilitate improvisations. Improvisations can also be created by dance instructors using imagery, music/soundscapes, or alternate pieces of art as a source of inspiration. Instructors may begin with shorter and simple improvisation tasks when first introducing the idea to minimize feelings of discomfort or uncertainty. Progress can then be made to include longer and less structured activities.

Lastly, instructors can support feelings of mastery, by providing opportunities which highlight the abilities of those in the class. Instructors should include and build on movements participants have mastered, which can contribute to feelings of competency. Mastery can also be supported by instructors using repetition within and between classes.

This thesis emphasizes the important role that neighbourhood programming can play in supporting older adults. Policy to support local programming connected to community associations/organizations is needed. Policy should support and enable neighbourhood-based organizations in developing partnerships with knowledgeable dance instructors and local infrastructure to host dance programs. Policy initiatives should also develop and support training opportunities for older adult dance instructors and neighbourhood organizations interested in offering dance programming to this population.

## **5.6 Strengths**

Exploring the holistic benefits of community dance for older adults was an overarching aim of this research. The theoretical framework used in this study allowed the researchers to examine the data through a strengths-based approach to aging, to consider psychosocial experiences of physical activity, and to align with a movement specific theory of embodiment. The use of these combined theoretical frameworks contributed to understanding that dancing, an

artistic and physical activity delivered in a social setting, allowed participants to connect to their artistic and creative self while also experiencing benefits to their physical and social wellness. The interdisciplinary team involved in this research included individuals with expertise in dance science, physical literacy, leadership and pedagogy, exercise psychology, and qualitative research methodology. The diverse expertise of the research team offered an opportunity to consider practices, theoretical frameworks, and analysis approaches across disciplines, and select those which best served the aims of the research. Dancing offers a complex and multidimensional experience, and therefore research approaches that embrace subjectivity and complexity must be used to advance current knowledge (Chappell et al., 2021; Marchant, 2016). This thesis embraced the complexity of dancing and explored multiple perspectives to understand the impact participation in community dance had on older adult participants. Findings contribute to knowledge about both the effects of community dance and the pedagogical approaches that may support these impacts. Both understandings are essential, as the promotion of dance programming for older adults must be paired with knowledge about how to effectively teach this population.

## **5.7 Limitations**

The case study design of this research offered a comprehensive investigation into one specific case of a community older adult dance class. Although this thesis offered novel contributions about community dance for older adults, there are limitations which must be considered in the interpretation of the findings. Older adult participants were white, educated, and of middle to upper socioeconomic status. Therefore, this sample does not represent that diversity that comprises the Canadian older adult population, and therefore results must be interpreted with caution. This research was conducted throughout the COVID-19 global health

crises. The pandemic may have impacted the participants' ability to share their perspectives on in-person classes, as interviews occurred months following in-person classes. Participant recruitment may have also been impacted by COVID-19 because all recruitment occurred via online methods, and therefore may not have reached all class participants.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **6.1 Future Research Directions**

Numerous avenues of future research could be explored following this research. Firstly, dimensions of embodiment (Svendler Nielsen, 2015) offers a theoretical framework to examine one's embodied experiences of dancing. Further research is needed to define and explore the relationships of creative and artistic domains of embodiment as the framework currently lacks a fully defined conceptualization which distinguish these domains. Further research is also needed to understand specific dance instructor behaviors which support the varied dimensions of one's embodiment. Research could also explore specific pedagogical behaviors which promote feelings of success as mastery for older adult dancers, as this was identified as important to fostering positive experiences of dancing. Lastly, our findings suggest brain-compatible dance (Gilbert, 2006, 2019) offers a pedagogical approach which is closely aligned with recommendations of physical literacy. Future study could examine how brain-compatible dance may enhance physical literacy across the lifespan.

### **6.2 Concluding Statements**

This case study explored one specific older adult community dance class to gain understanding of how participation supports successful aging, physical literacy, and embodiment. Perspectives of older adults, the dance instructor, and the instructors' pedagogical choices were explored. Findings from this thesis highlight how dancing offered opportunities for social connection. Dancing also allowed participants to be creative and expressive, which was facilitated by the dance instructor. Older adults connected to their embodied potential, which was fostered by the instructors' commitment to participants experiencing success. Dance participation supported a connection and appreciation to individuals' own embodiment, which

may result in a greater ability to connect and relate to others. Instructors are essential to the experience of the dance class and can include activities or design class content to support greater connection to the creative and artistic aspects of themselves, improved confidence, and to support feelings of success. The use of music in class also has great potential to influence the class experience. Engaging the body in movement to music while surrounded by others and led by a dance expert all contributes to the multidimensional benefits that community dance can offer older adults.



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## Appendix A: Consent form for Dance Instructor



### STANDARD CONSENT FORM

#### TITLE

**Community dance and contributions towards successful aging among older adults**

#### SPONSOR

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and University of Calgary

#### INVESTIGATORS

Principal Investigator: Dr. Meghan McDonough , Faculty of Kinesiology

Co-Investigators: Dr. Sarah Kenny (Faculties of Kinesiology/Arts), Dr. Cari Din (Faculty of Kinesiology)

*This consent form is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, please ask. Take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information. You will receive a copy of this form.*

#### BACKGROUND

Canada's population is aging. Two of the top challenges facing older Canadians are how to stay active and socially connected. We know that those who are active are healthier and happier people; we know that those who feel socially connected are more resilient. Much effort is being made to establish age-friendly communities that address these key physical and social needs of aging citizens. But there is a particular mode of physical activity that we don't know much about that may contribute to aging well through its focus on social, creative and expressive qualities: dance.

#### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study aims to understand the experiences of participating in a community dance program designed for older adults. We are also interested in the instruction of the dance program to understand what elements contribute to these experiences, and the role that community dance can play in aging well.

#### WHAT WOULD I HAVE TO DO?

If you decide that you want to be in this study, you will attend three or four interviews at various time points. The first two interviews will be early in the transition to online classes, the second would be when the program restarts in the fall, and the third interview would be when you transition back to in person classes if this has not occurred by the second interview. The discussions will be about 90-120 minutes. It will take place in a room at the Foothills Mennonite Church; at the University of Calgary; at your home; or remotely via telephone, Skype, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom. Zoom and Microsoft Teams calls will be conducted through a university account. Zoom calls will be password protected. Skype, Microsoft teams and Zoom provide a secure and encrypted connection. An external audio recorder will be used to record interviews, and audio files will be saved on a secure university server.

You will be asked about your perceptions of the dance program and your understanding of how dance contributes to the students' experiences, as well as how your teaching has modified and shifted with the need for online class delivery due to COVID-19, and then return to in-person class. Following the completion of your interview, you will be asked to review the interview transcript and will be given an opportunity to change or remove any passages. After we have analyzed the information, we will send you a report by email or mail. We will arrange to talk to you by phone, online (via Skype, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom), or in person for about 15-30 minutes. We will ask whether you feel the summary reflects your thoughts, and if you have feedback.

Additionally, if you decide to participate in the study, you will share the online class content with the research team for analysis. This analysis will examine the pedagogical decisions and approaches used in classes.

### **WHAT ARE THE RISKS?**

The questions that we will ask are similar to those used in many studies. There are minimal risks to answering these questions. It is possible that you may not be comfortable with certain questions. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

### **WILL I BENEFIT IF I TAKE PART?**

If you agree to participate in this study, there may or may not be a direct benefit to you. The information we get from this study may help us to provide better successful aging strategies for Canada's older populations.

### **DO I HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?**

**Voluntariness and Withdrawal of Consent** — Being in the study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw, please contact the principal investigator or member of the research team. The principal investigator may stop your participation in the study early for reasons such as you are not able to complete all the procedures, the sponsor decides to stop the study, or the research ethics board withdraws permission for the study to continue. If new information becomes available that might affect your willingness to take part in the study, we will inform you as soon as possible.

**Withdrawal of Study Data** — You may withdraw your permission to use information that was collected about you for this study until analysis has begun, which is usually within 3 months of original data collection, by letting the principal investigator know. Data cannot be withdrawn if they have been published or presented.

**WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING, OR DO I HAVE TO PAY FOR ANYTHING?**

You will not get paid for being a part of this study. You will not have to pay for anything. You may have costs for parking if your interview is at the University of Calgary campus. If that is the case, we will reimburse you for parking costs.

**WILL MY RECORDS BE KEPT PRIVATE?**

Only the researchers responsible for this study, and the Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board will have access to information collected. You will be assigned a study ID number. A list linking your study ID number with your name will be kept by the principal investigator in a secure place, separate from your study file. Recordings of the interview will be transcribed. All information that could identify you will be deleted from the transcripts. All of your answers will be kept confidential. You will be identified with a study ID number only. Records identifying you, including your name, phone number, and email/postal address will be kept confidential.

**SIGNATURES**

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood, to your satisfaction, the information regarding your participation in the research project and that you agree to participate as a participant. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you have further questions concerning matters related to this research, please contact:

Dr. Meghan McDonough (Principal Investigator): [REDACTED]

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a possible participant in this research, please contact the Chair, Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board, University of Calgary at 1-403-220-7990.

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Participant's Name

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Signature and Date

---

Investigator/Delegate's Name

---

Signature and Date



---

Witness' Name

---

Signature and Date

The University of Calgary Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.  
A signed copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

## **Appendix B: Dance Instructor Interview Guide 1**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE: Community Dance for Older Adults DANCE INSTRUCTOR- 1<sup>st</sup> Interview**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

[Welcome and thank the participants]

- Our primary interest in this interview is to better understand your dance instruction and how it helps participants positively develop in your program.
- I will audio record our discussion. The recordings and transcripts of our conversation are confidential, as outlined in the consent form. You will have an opportunity to review the interview transcript before analysis begins. Information and quotations that emerge from our analysis will be used in publications and presentations of this research, but any information that could identify you will be removed from the data.
- I am here to learn from you. I will ask certain questions, but I encourage you to include anything you feel is relevant. There are no right or wrong answers. We are here to better understand your perspectives.
- You may choose not to answer any particular question, or to discontinue at any point if you wish.
- Do you have any questions before we begin?

[Review and sign consent form]

[Start the audio recorder]

#### **QUESTIONS**

##### **Part 1. Introduction/Dance teaching experience**

1. How many years have you been teaching dance? In the University Heights program?
2. What led you to become a dance instructor? An instructor for this program?
3. How would you describe your teaching philosophy (your approach to teaching)?
  - a. Has teaching in this program influenced your teaching philosophy? How so?
4. What is meaningful or important to you about teaching the class? What do you gain from your experiences?

##### **Part 2. Teaching practices: In person**

Next, I have some questions about your teaching practices and techniques in the program. I will ask you first about your experiences when you were teaching in person before COVID-19, and then will ask you about what you are doing now, and how things have changed.

1. Tell me about your experiences and perspectives teaching the University Heights movement and dance program, when you were meeting in person.
  - a. How did you plan for each class?

- b. Can you describe the environment you aimed to create?
  - c. Can you tell me about any drawbacks or difficulties you experienced while teaching in person? Any benefits or advantages?
- 2. What kinds of things did you do to provide the right amount of challenge for each participant?
  - a. How do you balance providing challenge, with providing support for your participants?
    - i. Do you find that this is a difficult balance to strike? How so?
    - ii. How did you work with individual differences within the class?
    - iii. Does your approach to finding the balance between providing challenge and support vary when working with different participants? How so?
- 3. Can you describe your practices for providing feedback when the class was in person?
  - a. Did you provide individual feedback? How so?
  - b. Feedback about progress? How so?
  - c. What markers of progress or improvement do you look for, and why?
- 4. Can you describe your practices for encouraging participants be expressive or creative?
- 5. Can you describe what you do to encourage confidence during the classes?
- 6. In your experience, what are effective ways to support your participants to:
  - a. Help them participate in the class, or engage in opportunities?
  - b. Help them grow and improve?
  - c. Help them overcome or cope with challenges and difficulties?
  - d. Are there kinds of support that are particularly important to these participants?
- 7. Are there things you did that involved students in the design and delivery of the in-person classes? Can you describe those to me?

#### Chapter 1:

#### **Part 3. Teaching practices: Online**

Next, I'd like to ask you about your experiences teaching online, and how things changed after COVID-19.

- 1. How many classes have you led using the online delivery method?
- 2. Did you feel that it was important to continue delivering class throughout the COVID-19 crisis? If yes, could you share why?
- 3. How is class delivered now? What is different about this method of delivery?
  - a. How has your preparation for class changed?
  - b. What aspects of your class have you kept the same now that you have transitioned to online delivery? What have you changed?
  - c. Has anything changed in terms of the class environment you try to create, or how you try to create it, now that you are delivering online classes?

## **Appendix C: Dance Instructor Interview Guide 2**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE: Community Dance for Older Adults**

#### **DANCE INSTRUCTOR- 1<sup>st</sup> Interview**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

[Welcome and thank the participants]

#### **Part 1. Teaching practices: Online**

4. How is class delivered now? What is different about this method of delivery?
    - a. How has your preparation for class changed?
    - b. What aspects of your class have you kept the same now that you have transitioned to online delivery? What have you changed?
    - c. Has anything changed in terms of the class environment you try to create, or how you try to create it, now that you are delivering online classes?
  5. Are there any new or exciting opportunities that have come with online class delivery?
  6. Are there any challenges you faced delivering class online? If yes, please tell me about them.
    - a. Have you found solutions to these challenges?
  7. What kind of feedback have you received about the online classes?
  8. What kinds of things do you do differently to create the right amount of challenge for each participant, now that you are teaching online?
- Chapter 2: Are there things that are more difficult about striking this balance when you are teaching online? Easier? Can you tell me about them?
9. What kinds of things do you do differently to provide feedback for participants, now that you are teaching online?
    - a. Are there things that are more difficult about providing feedback when you are teaching online? Easier? Can you tell me about them?
  10. Are there ways you feel the online classes have changed the ways in which participants can be expressive or creative? If yes, how so?
    - a. Have the ways you try to encourage creativity and expression changed?
  11. Have the ways that you try to enhance participants' confidence changed with the move to online classes? If yes, how so?
  12. Are there things that you are doing differently to support the participants, now that you are teaching online?
    - a. Help them participate in the class, or engage in opportunities?
    - b. Help them grow and improve?
    - c. Help them overcome or cope with challenges and difficulties?
    - d. Are there types of support that are different now that you are teaching online?

- e. Are you doing anything differently in terms of whether and how you are involving students in the design and delivery of the online classes?

## **Part 2. Facilitating social connection: In person**

Now I'd like to ask you about the social interactions and connections in the class. Again, I will ask you first about your experiences when you were teaching in person before COVID-19, and then will ask you about what you are doing now, and how things have changed.

1. Can you describe to me anything you did during in person classes that encouraged your participants to interact with each other? To be social, and build relationships?
  - a. Tell me about the ways in which the physical (dancing) and social (social participation) elements are integrated within the dance and movement class (e.g., group movement, activities with adjacent social time, other ways)?
    - i. Does anything hinder this integration?
  - b. Are there any drawbacks to the social interactions that occur in the class?
  - c. Is there anything that makes it challenging or difficult, or limits participants from interacting socially in the class?
2. In what ways did you see social connection affecting participants?

## **Part 3. Facilitating social connection: Online**

Next, I'd like to ask you about your experiences teaching online, and how things changed after COVID-19.

1. From your perspective, how did the start of COVID-19 affect the social interactions and connections among the participants in the class?
2. Are there ways you have tried to help encourage or maintain the social aspect of class now that they are being delivered online? If so, could you explain what those ways are?
  - a. Are there ways in which the social environment fostered by the online class is similar? Different?
  - b. What challenges do you face when facilitating social connection with this online class delivery? Have you found ways to overcome these challenges?
3. Are there any ways in which the effects of the social connections on participants has changed?

## **Part 4. Effects on participants**

We are getting toward the end of my questions, but in this last part I would like to ask you about how you see the program affecting the participants.

1. In what ways did you see dancing affecting your students when you were meeting in person?
  - a. Effects seen during class?
  - b. Effects seen outside of the class?
  - c. Are there ways in which you think participating in the class affected their ability to cope with challenges or difficulties?

2. Have you seen any ways in which those effects have changed now that you are meeting online?
  - a. Effects seen during class? Outside of the class?
  - b. Are there changes to ways in which the class has affected their ability to cope with challenges or difficulties?
  - c. Have any of the effects been enhanced? Declined?
  - d. Are there new examples you have seen of how they are impacted by participating?

**Part 5. Closing**

Those are all of my questions.

1. Is there something else that you would like to add related to our discussion today?
2. Is there anything else we discussed that you'd like to return to at this point?
3. Is there anything that you'd like to ask me?

Thank you for participating in the interview.

## **Appendix D: Dance Instructor Interview Guide 3**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE: Community Dance for Older Adults**

#### **DANCE INSTRUCTOR- 3<sup>rd</sup> Interview**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

[Welcome and thank the participants]

- Our primary interest in this interview is to better understand your dance instruction and the adaptations you have made with the shift to online class delivery
- I will audio record our discussion. The recordings and transcripts of our conversation are confidential, as outlined in the consent form. You will have an opportunity to review the interview transcript before analysis begins. Information and quotations that emerge from our analysis will be used in publications and presentations of this research, but any information that could identify you will be removed from the data.
- I am here to learn from you. I will ask certain questions, but I encourage you to include anything you feel is relevant. There are no right or wrong answers. We are here to better understand your perspectives.
- You may choose not to answer any particular question, or to discontinue at any point if you wish.
- Do you have any questions before we begin?

#### **QUESTIONS**

##### **Part 1. Introduction**

1. How many classes have you delivered using the online method since our previous interview?
2. Has the structure or method of delivery of the online classes changed since we last spoke? How so?

##### **Part 2. Teaching Practices**

1. Has your approach to teaching the classes evolved since we last spoke?
  - a) What elements of the class have changed?
    - i) What led you to make these changes?
2. Have you as a teacher learnt anything new as a result of delivering classes online since we last spoke? If so, could you tell me about what you learned?
  - a) Has your teaching philosophy evolved? How so?
3. Are there elements in the class that you find easier to facilitate online?
  - a) Has it become easier to facilitate online classes now that you have had more experience?
4. Are there any new or recent challenges have you faced with online teaching?
  - a) Have you been able to overcome them? If yes, how so?

- b) Is there anything that you expected to be a challenge with online teaching that ended up not being a problem? If so, could you tell me about them?
- 5. Have you received any additional feedback about the online classes since we previously spoke? Can you describe it to me?
- 6. Has your approach evolved since we last spoke about how you provide the right amount of challenge for each participants?
- 7. Are there new ways in which you have changed or adapted how you give feedback to participants?
  - a) Are there things that have persisted to be difficult about providing feedback when you are teaching online? Can you tell me about them?
- 8. Are there ways you feel the online classes have changed the ways in which participants can be expressive or creative? If yes, how so?
- 9. Do you feel that the participant's confidence has changed with online classes? If yes, how so?
- 10. Have you changed the support you provide for the participants? If yes, how so?
  - a) Are there types of support that you have found to be most important?

### **Part 3. Facilitating Social Connection**

**Next I am going to ask you about the social interactions and connections in the online classes.**

- 1. From your perspective, how has the duration of COVID-19 affected the social interactions and connections among the participants of the class?
- 2. Are there new ways you have tried to help encourage or maintain the social aspect of class?
  - a) Are there any new challenges you have faced when facilitating social connection with this online class delivery?
- 3. In what ways do you feel the online classes has affected the social connection among participants?

### **Part 4. Effects on participants**

**We are getting toward the end of my questions, but in this last part I would like to ask you about how you see the program affecting the participants.**

- 3. Have you seen any further changes in which the effects of the class have changed with this online delivery?
  - a. Effects seen during class? Outside of the class?
    - i. Are there new examples you have seen of how they are impacted by participating?

**\*If classes have returned to in-person delivery include Part 5 -7**

**\*\*If classes have not returned to in- person delivery skip to Part 8**

### **Part 5. Return to In-Person Class**

**Next we are now going to discuss the transition to in-person classes.**



1. Tell me about the transition from the online class back to the in-person format.
2. Are there things you learnt when teaching online that you have transferred into the in-person classes? If so, could you tell me about them?
  - a) What elements?
  - b) Why did you decide to retain these changes?
  - c) Were some of these elements you tried to transfer more effective or successful than others?
  - d) Have these learnings changed your teaching philosophy?
3. Are there any elements of the class that you find easier to facilitate now that you have returned to in-person classes?
  - a) Why do you think this is?
4. What challenges or restrictions have you faced with the return to in-person class delivery?
  - a) Have you been able to overcome them? If yes, how so?
  - b) Is there anything that you expected to be a challenge with the return to in-person teaching that ended up not being a problem? If so, could you tell me about them?
5. Have you received any feedback about the in-person classes since you have returned?
  - a) How has that feedback influenced your subsequent classes?
6. Are there ways in which you have changed how you give feedback to participants? If yes, how so?
  - a) Compared to the online classes?
  - b) Compared to how you used to give feedback during in-person classes?
  - c) Are there things that are easier about providing feedback when you are teaching in person? More difficult? Can you tell me about them?
7. Can you describe your practices for encouraging participants be expressive or creative?
8. Can you describe what you do to encourage confidence during the classes?
9. Has your approach to providing appropriate challenges for each participant changed? If yes, how so?
  - a) Compared to the online classes?
  - b) Compared to how you used to give feedback during in-person classes?
  - c) Are there things that are more difficult about striking a balance between challenging and supporting participants compared to when you were teaching online? Easier? Can you tell me about them?
10. Has the support you provide for the participants changed? If yes, how so?
  - a) Compared to the online classes?
  - b) Compared to how you used to give feedback during in-person classes?
11. Are you doing anything differently in terms of whether and how you are involving students in the design and delivery of the classes since you switched back to in-person classes?

#### Chapter 3:

#### **Part 6. Return to In-Person Class- Facilitating social connection**

1. Have the ways you integrate social connection into the class changed? In what ways?
  - a) Compared to the online classes?
  - b) Compared to the previous in-person classes?
  - c) What led you to make these changed?

- d) Do you feel the changes have been successful? How so/not?
- 2. In what ways do you feel the return to in-person classes has affected the social connection among participants?

**Part 7. Return to In-Person Class- Effects on Participants**

- 1. Have you seen any ways in which the effects on participants have changed now that you have returned to in-person classes?
  - a. Effects seen during class? Outside of the class?
  - b. Are there changes to ways in which the class has affected their ability to cope with challenges or difficulties?
  - c. Have any of the effects been enhanced? Declined?
  - d. Are there new examples you have seen of how they are impacted by participating?

**Part 8. Closing**

- 1. Is there something else that you would like to add related to our discussion today?
- 2. Is there anything else we discussed that you'd like to return to at this point?
- 3. Is there anything that you'd like to ask me?

Thank you for participating in the interview.

## Appendix E: Older Adult Email Recruitment Script



### Recruitment Email

#### Community dance and contributions towards successful aging among older adults

Hello

My name is [research team member name]. I am part of a research team led by Dr. Meghan McDonough in the Faculty of Kinesiology at the University of Calgary. We are doing a study looking at the experiences of partaking in a community dance program that is designed for older adults. We are also interested in the instruction of the dance program to understand what elements contribute to these experiences, and the role that community dance can play in aging well. The University of Calgary Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board has approved this study. We are contacting you to invite you to participate in our study.

To be eligible for this study, you must be:

1. 60 years of age or older
2. Currently enrolled or have been enrolled in the University Heights Dance Program
3. Be able to participate in an interview in English at the Foothills Mennonite Church, the University of Calgary main campus, at your home, by phone, or online via Skype, Teams or Zoom. \*note that in-person options will not be included in the email if meeting in person is not considered safe based on public health recommendations or requirements at the time of sending

If you are eligible and volunteer for this study, you would participate in one 60-90 minute interview about your about your experiences participating in the community dance program that is designed for older adults. You will also be asked to complete a 5-10 minute questionnaire about your physical activity behavior and demographic information during this time. Following the completion of your interview, you will be asked to review the interview transcript and will be given an opportunity to change or remove any passages. After we have analyzed the information, we will send you a report by email or mail. We will arrange to talk to you by phone, online (via Skype, Microsoft Teams or Zoom), or in person for about 10-15 minutes. We will ask whether you feel the summary reflects your thoughts, and if you have feedback.

There are no costs to you for participating in this study.

If you would like to volunteer for this study, or have questions about it, please contact [research assistant name] by email at [research assistant phone number] or by phone at 1 (403) 220-2847

If you know someone else who may be eligible for and may be interested in participating in this study, please feel free to share this invitation.

Thank you.

## Appendix F: Older Adult Verbal Recruitment Script



### Verbal Recruitment Script

#### Community dance and contributions towards successful aging among older adults

Hello

This is [research team member name] a member of a research team led by Dr. Meghan McDonough in the Faculty of Kinesiology at the University of Calgary. They are doing a study looking at the experiences of partaking in a community dance program that is designed for older adults. They are also interested in the instruction of the dance program to understand what elements contribute to these experiences, and the role that community dance can play in aging well. The University of Calgary Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board has approved this study. We are contacting you to invite you to participate in our study.

To be eligible for this study, you must be:

1. 60 years of age or older
2. Currently participating or have previously participated in the University Heights Dance Program
3. Be able to participate in an interview in English at the Foothills Mennonite Church, the University of Calgary main campus, at your home, or via telephone, Skype, Microsoft Teams or Zoom.

\*note that in-person options will not be included in the email if they are not considered safe based on public health recommendations or requirements at the time of sending

If you are eligible and volunteer for this study, you would participate in one 60-90 minute interview about your about your experiences participating in the community dance program that is designed for older adults. You will also be asked to complete a 5-10 minute questionnaire about your physical activity behavior and demographic information during this time. Following the completion of your interview, you will be asked to review the interview transcript and will be given an opportunity to change or remove any passages. After we have analyzed the information, we will send you a report by email or mail. We will arrange to talk to you by phone, online (via Skype, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom) or in person for about 10-15 minutes. We will ask whether you feel the summary reflects your thoughts, and if you have feedback.

There are no costs to you for participating in this study.

If you would like to volunteer for this study, or have questions about it, please contact [research assistant name] by email at [research assistant phone number] or by phone at [REDACTED]

If you know someone else who may be eligible for and may be interested in participating in this study, please feel free to share this invitation.

Thank you.

## Appendix G: Older Adult Participant Consent Form



### STANDARD CONSENT FORM

#### TITLE

**Community dance and contributions towards successful aging among older adults**

#### SPONSOR

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and University of Calgary

#### INVESTIGATORS

Principal Investigator: Dr. Meghan McDonough , Faculty of Kinesiology

Co-Investigators: Dr. Sarah Kenny (Faculties of Kinesiology/Arts), Dr. Cari Din (Faculty of Kinesiology)

*This consent form is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, please ask. Take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information. You will receive a copy of this form.*

#### BACKGROUND

Canada's population is aging. Two of the top challenges facing older Canadians are how to stay active and socially connected. We know that those who are active are healthier and happier people; we know that those who feel socially connected are more resilient. Much effort is being made to establish age-friendly communities that address these key physical and social needs of aging citizens. But there is a particular mode of physical activity that we don't know much about that may contribute to aging well through its focus on social, creative and expressive qualities: dance.

#### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study aims to understand the experiences of participating in a community dance program designed for older adults. We are also interested in the instruction of the dance program to understand what elements contribute to these experiences, and the role that community dance can play in aging well.

#### WHAT WOULD I HAVE TO DO?

If you decide that you want to be in this study, you will attend one interview. The discussion will be about 60-90 minutes. It will take place in person (at a room at the Foothills Mennonite Church, the University of Calgary or at your home), or via telephone, Skype, Microsoft Teams or Zoom. Zoom and Microsoft Teams calls will be conducted through a university account. Zoom calls will be password protected. Skype, Microsoft teams and Zoom provide a secure and encrypted connection. An external audio recorder will be used to record interviews, and audio files will be saved on a secure university server.

Interviews will be conducted individually, based on your needs and preferences. You will be asked about your experiences participating in the community dance program that is designed for older adults. You will also be asked to complete a questionnaire during this time that allows us to gain information on your physical activity behavior and demographic information. The questionnaire will take about 5-10 minutes. Following the completion of your interview, you will be asked to review the interview transcript and will be given an opportunity to change or remove any passages. After we have analyzed the information, we will send you a report by email or mail. We will arrange to talk to you by phone, online (via Skype, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom) or in person for about 10-15 minutes. We will ask whether you feel the summary reflects your thoughts, and if you have feedback.

### **WHAT ARE THE RISKS?**

The questions that we will ask are similar to those used in many studies. There are minimal risks to answering these questions. It is possible that you may not be comfortable with certain questions. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

### **WILL I BENEFIT IF I TAKE PART?**

If you agree to participate in this study, there may or may not be a direct benefit to you. The information we get from this study may help us provide better successful aging strategies for Canada's older populations.

### **DO I HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?**

**Voluntariness and Withdrawal of Consent** — Being in the study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw, please contact the principal investigator or member of the research team. The principal investigator may stop your participation in the study early for reasons such as you are not able to complete all the procedures, the sponsor decides to stop the study, or the research ethics board withdraws permission for the study to continue. If new information becomes available that might affect your willingness to take part in the study, we will inform you as soon as possible.

**Withdrawal of Study Data** — You may withdraw your permission to use information that was collected about you for this study until analysis has begun, which is usually within 3 months of original data collection, by letting the principal investigator or member of the research team know. Data cannot be withdrawn if it has been published or presented.

**WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING, OR DO I HAVE TO PAY FOR ANYTHING?**

You will not get paid for being a part of this study. You will not have to pay for anything. You may have costs for parking if your interview is at the University of Calgary campus. If that is the case, we will reimburse you for parking costs.

**WILL MY RECORDS BE KEPT PRIVATE?**

Only the researchers responsible for this study, and the Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board will have access to information collected. You will be assigned a study ID number. A list linking your study ID number with your name will be kept by the principal investigator in a secure place, separate from your study file. Recordings of the interview will be transcribed. All information that could identify you will be deleted from the transcripts. All of your answers will be kept confidential. You will be identified with a study ID number only. Records identifying you, including your name, phone number, and email/postal address will be kept confidential.

**SIGNATURES**

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood, to your satisfaction, the information regarding your participation in the research project and that you agree to participate as a participant. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you have further questions concerning matters related to this research, please contact:

Dr. Meghan McDonough (Principal Investigator): [REDACTED]

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a possible participant in this research, please contact the Chair, Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board, University of Calgary at 1-403-220-7990.

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 Participant's Name

---

 Signature and Date

---

 Investigator/Delegate's Name

---

 Signature and Date

---

 Witness' Name

---

 Signature and Date

The University of Calgary Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board has approved this research study. A signed copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.



## Appendix H: Older Adult Participant Questionnaire



### Community Dance and Contributions towards successful gaining among Older Adults

### Questionnaire

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ID

Please answer the following questions by writing your answer on the line or checking/filling in the appropriate bubble.

### Physical Activity Questions

1. Please list the physical activities that you participate in: \_\_\_\_\_

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2. We would like you to recall your **average weekly exercise over the past month**. How many times per week on average did you do the following kinds of exercise over the past month, and for how long?

Chapter 4:

Chapter 5: *When answering these questions please remember to:*

Chapter 6: Consider your average weekly exercise over the past month.

Chapter 7: Only count exercise sessions that lasted **15 minutes or longer** in duration.

Chapter 8: Only count exercise that was done during free time (i.e. do not include occupation or housework)

Chapter 9:

Chapter 10: Note the main difference between the categories is the intensity of the exercise.

Chapter 11: Write the average number of times per week and the average duration in the space provided.

**A. STRENUOUS EXERCISE (Heart beats rapidly, sweating)**

(e.g., running, jogging, hockey, soccer, squash, cross country skiing, judo, roller skating, vigorous swimming, vigorous long distance bicycling, vigorous aerobic dance classes, heavy weight training)

**In an average week I was involved in strenuous exercise \_\_\_\_\_  
times/week for an average duration of \_\_\_\_\_ minutes/each session.**

**B. MODERATE EXERCISE (Not exhausting, light perspiration)**

(e.g., fast walking, baseball, tennis, easy bicycling, volleyball, badminton, easy swimming, alpine skiing, popular and folk dancing)

**In an average week I was involved in moderate exercise \_\_\_\_\_  
times/week for an average duration of \_\_\_\_\_ minutes/each session.**

**C. MILD EXERCISE (Minimal effort, no perspiration)**

(e.g., easy walking, yoga, archery, fishing, bowling, lawn bowling, shuffleboard, horseshoes, golf, snowmobiling)

**In an average week I was involved in mild exercise \_\_\_\_\_ times/week for  
an average duration of \_\_\_\_\_ minutes/each session.**

**Chapter 12: D. RESISTANCE TRAINING EXERCISE**

(e.g. exercises with dumbbells, body weight, bands, such as squats, bicep curls, etc.)

**In an average week I perform resistance training activities \_\_\_\_\_  
times/ week for an average duration of \_\_\_\_\_ minutes/session.**

**E. FLEXIBILITY TRAINING EXERCISE**

(e.g. yoga, stretching)

**In an average week I perform flexibility training activities \_\_\_\_\_  
times/ week for an average duration of \_\_\_\_\_ minutes/session.**

**Demographic Questions**

3. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ years
4. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Sexual Orientation: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you identify with any of the following cultural/racial/ethnic groups? Please indicate **all** that apply to you.
- ☐ Indigenous
  - ☐ White
  - ☐ South Asian
  - ☐ Chinese
  - ☐ Black
  - ☐ Filipino
  - ☐ Latin American
  - ☐ Arab
  - ☐ Southeast Asian
  - ☐ West Asian
  - ☐ Korean
  - ☐ Japanese
  - ☐ Other. Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Were you born in Canada?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No. How many years have you lived in Canada? \_\_\_\_\_ years
8. What is your highest level of education?
- ☐ Did not complete high school
  - ☐ High school diploma
  - ☐ Some post-secondary, but did not complete diploma or degree
  - ☐ College or technical diploma or certificate
  - ☐ University undergraduate degree
  - ☐ Post-graduate degree

9. What is the total income for your household for the past 12 months? This household income can be based on any source (including pensions, investments, as well as salaries).

- ☐ Less than \$5,000
- ☐ \$5,000 to \$9,999
- ☐ \$10,000 to \$14,999
- ☐ \$15,000 to \$19,999
- ☐ \$20,000 to \$24,999
- ☐ \$25,000 to \$29,999
- ☐ \$30,000 to \$39,999
- ☐ \$40,000 to \$59,999
- ☐ \$60,000 to \$79,999
- ☐ \$80,000 or over

Chapter 13:

10. What is your current working status?

- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Working/studying full-time
- ☐ Working/studying part-time
- ☐ On disability or sick leave
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter 14:

11. What is your current marital status?

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Common-law
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Widowed

12. Do you have children?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes. Number of children: \_\_\_\_\_

13. How many people live in your household? \_\_\_\_\_

14. Do you have a disability or chronic health condition that limits your social activities?

- a. No
- b. Yes. How long have you had this disability or condition? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

15. Are you the primary caregiver to a person with a disability or chronic health condition?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes. How long have you been a primary caregiver? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

***Thank you for taking part in our research.***

## **Appendix I: Older Adult Participant Interview Guide**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE: Community Dance for Older Adults DANCE PARTICIPANTS**

The interview guide includes questions about older adults' physical, social, creative and artistic experiences of dancing and their understanding of pathways through which dance is associated with physical literacy and successful aging.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

[Welcome and thank the participants]

- Our primary interest in this interview is to understand your experiences participating in a community dance and movement program for older adults.
- I will audio record our discussion. Only members of the research team will be able to listen to the recordings and read the interview transcripts, as outlined in the consent form. Information and quotations that emerge from our analysis will be used in publications and presentations of this research, but any information that could identify you will be removed from the data.
- I am here to learn from you. I will ask certain questions, but I encourage you to include anything that you may feel is relevant. There are no right or wrong answers. We are here to better understand your perspectives.
- You may choose not to answer any particular question, or to discontinue at any point if you wish.
- Do you have any questions before we begin?
- I will now be turning on the audio recording device (phone interviews only)

[Review and sign consent form]

[Completion questionnaire]

[Start the audio recorder]

#### **QUESTIONS**

##### **Part 1. Introduction/Physical activity and dance experience**

1. Please describe your previous experiences with physical activity. How did these experiences make you feel?
  - Formal programs like exercise, dance, sport, and active recreation activities, etc.
  - Informal activities like walking, hiking, cycling, gardening, etc.

##### **Part 2. University Heights Dance and Movement program**

1. Please tell me about your experience in the University Heights Dance and Movement program.
2. How did you get involved in this program?



3. How long have you been participating in the program?
4. What are some of the highlights you have had participating in the program?
5. What benefits have you experienced from participating in the program?
6. What is important to you about participating in the University Heights Dance and Movement program?
7. What aspects of the class encourage you to return each week?
8. Are there drawbacks or challenges that you experience/perceive while participating?
  - a. Do they affect your participation in the program?
9. Were there any difficulties or challenges you thought you might experience but that ended up not being a problem?
  - a. Can you tell me about those expectations, and how they compared to your experiences with the program?

### **Part 3. Experiences of physical literacy**

1. How do you feel about your skills and ability during class?
2. How confident do you feel during the class? Are there experiences in the class when you feel more or less confident?
3. Are there ways in which you feel moving to music enriches your experiences in the class? Please tell me about them.
4. Do you feel you are able to express yourself when you are dancing? If so, please tell me about those experiences.
5. Does participating in this program influence your motivation to be physically active?
  - If yes, how so?
  - Does being in this program impact your physical activity levels overall?
6. Does dancing affect your feelings of independence? How so?
  - Probes:
    - What leads you to feel this way?
    - Can you tell me about what those experiences are like for you?
    - Can you expand that idea?
    - Can you share an example?

### **Part 4. Experiences of social connection**

I would like you to think about whether, and in what ways, dancing, moving, or exercising to music *with other people* impacts you.

1. Is it important or meaningful for you that this is a group program, with other people?
2. How well do you know the other people in the class?
  - a. Can you tell me about those relationships?
  - b. Tell me about what is important to you about your relationships with other people who you know well.

- c. Are your relationships with other people who you do not know, as well in the group, important to you? In what ways?
- 3. Are there ways in which the other people in the program support you being physically active, and participating in the dance and movement program yourself?
  - a. Can you tell me about those experiences?
  - b. What do other people do that is supportive of your physical activity?
- 4. Are there ways in which the support you get from the program could be improved? How so?
- 5. Are there any relationships that you have with individuals in the program that extend beyond the class itself? Can you tell me about those relationships?
- 6. Are the coffee and snacks after class important to you? If so, in what ways?

Chapter 15:

### **Part 5. Experiences of resilience**

Before we finish up, I would like to ask you for your thoughts on whether and how participating in the program may affect how you deal with difficulties, challenges, or stress.

- 1. Have your experiences participating in the program affected your ability to recover from difficult experiences? In what ways?
- 2. Have your experiences participating in the program affected your ability to cope with difficulties or challenges you face outside of the class? In what ways?
- 3. Has your experience participating in the class had an impact on your ability to cope with, adapt to, and manage challenges you face related to growing older? Please explain.
- 4. How have you been effected by covid-19, and the impact it had the dance and movement class?

### **Part 6: Closing**

Those are all of my questions.

- 1. Is there something else that you would like to add related to our discussion today?
- 2. Can I follow up with you if I have any further questions?

Thank you for participating in the interview.