

University of Northern Colorado

Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC

Master's Theses

Student Research

12-9-2020

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN THE DANCE CLASSROOM: BUILDING BRIDGES TO RIGOROUS LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Breegan Kearney
breegankearney@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digscholarship.unco.edu/theses>

Recommended Citation

Kearney, Breegan, "ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN THE DANCE CLASSROOM: BUILDING BRIDGES TO RIGOROUS LANGUAGE ACQUISITION" (2020). *Master's Theses*. 184.
<https://digscholarship.unco.edu/theses/184>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. For more information, please contact Jane.Monson@unco.edu.

© 2020

BREEGAN KEARNEY

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN THE DANCE
CLASSROOM: BUILDING BRIDGES
TO RIGOROUS LANGUAGE
ACQUISITION

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Breegan Kearney

College of Performing and Visual Arts
School of Theatre Arts and Dance
Dance Education

December 2020

This Thesis by: Breegan Kearney

Entitled: *English Language Learners in the Dance Classroom: Building Bridges to Rigorous Language Acquisition*

has been approved as meeting the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the College of Performing and Visual Arts in the School of Theatre Arts and Dance, Program of Dance Education

Accepted by the Thesis Committee:

Sandra L. Minton, Ph.D., Chair, Advisor

Christy O'Connell-Black, M.A., Committee Member

Accepted by the Graduate School:

Jeri-Anne Lyons, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School
Associate Vice President for Research

ABSTRACT

Kearney, Breegan. *English Language Learners in the Dance Classroom: Building Bridges to Rigorous Language Acquisition*. Unpublished Master of Arts thesis, University of Northern Colorado, 2020.

The purpose of this study was to investigate several aspects of instructing English Learners (ELs) in the dance classroom. The researcher created three essential questions to guide her research:

- Q1 What specific strategies are currently being utilized by dance teachers to support English Learners in accessing dance-specific language?
- Q2 What are the opportunities for and barriers to incorporating these strategies?
- Q3 Does this teaching process have any effect on student engagement in dance class?

Thirty dance educators discussed their experiences instructing English Learners in dance content in the form of a digital survey, and rated common strategies for ELs based on their frequency of use. Some limitations of this study were that EL student voices were not incorporated into the research, the sample size of participants who were teachers was relatively small and only reflected their respective experiences, and was therefore not completely comprehensive. Additionally, the research tool was created by the researcher and had not been verified for validity by other research.

Analysis of the data showed that multi-modal educational approaches and peer collaboration were used frequently by the participants. The findings of this research suggested that opportunities for more linguistic rigor in dance class exist, especially in activities which relate to the Reflecting and Connecting aspects of the National Core Arts Standards for Dance. A

major barrier to effective EL instruction reported by participants in this study was a lack of support and training which was either non-existent or generally irrelevant to the dance classroom. Finally, this study showed that the participants felt that students were engaged in dance class, and that the dance classroom was a place where they felt respected and safe.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the support of many people. First and foremost, I extend my deepest gratitude to my advisor Dr. Sandra Minton, who provided indispensable feedback and countless helpful solutions. Thank you for graciously guiding me every step of the way. I would also like to extend my sincerest thanks to Professor O'Connell-Black for nurturing my growth as a dance educator and providing unwavering support. The two of you have created an invaluable Dance Education M.A. program, and I am so appreciative of the path you have worked so hard to lay for future dance educators and arts advocates.

I am remarkably grateful for all of the participants who chose to dedicate their time, experience, and expertise in order to complete the research survey. I extend my sincerest thanks to you all.

I would also like to thank my mother Bonnie Kearney and my late father Barney Kearney. My parents generously supported me in being an arts lover from a very early age, driving me to countless music, visual art, theater, and dance lessons. Thank you both for your encouragement and unwavering love throughout my life.

Thank you to Tim Sypasong, who lovingly reminded me that what I was writing was important enough to matter. You really lent me the strength I needed to complete this thesis.

I want to thank my wonderful students at Rocky Mountain Prep Southwest for inspiring me to write this thesis. All of you are truly incredible and show me how to embody perseverance, excellence, adventure, and kindness every day that I have the joy of teaching you.

Finally, I wish to thank the other members of my UNC Master of Arts Dance Education cohort. I found myself belonging to and able to share with a group of brilliant people who are passionate about dance education, and who truly understand what it means to be arts advocates. Together we forged ahead in creating our masters theses in the midst of a global pandemic, and I am so grateful to you all for inspiring me. A special thank you goes to Ann Moradian, who exchanged ideas, challenged me, and philosophized with me on our carpool commute to and from UNC during the summer of 2019.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Goal of Thesis	1
	Purpose of Study	5
	Significance of Study	8
II.	REVIEW OF LITERATURE	10
	The Value of Arts Education	10
	Supporting English Learners	16
	Instructing English Learners in the Dance Classroom.....	21
III.	METHODOLOGY	28
	Preparation for the Study	28
	The Research Context	28
	The Participants' Experiences	29
	The Research Instrument	32
	The Data Analysis	33
	Summary of the Methodology	34
IV.	DISCUSSION	36
	Specific Strategies Used by Dance Teachers	36
	Barriers to Effective Instruction	47
	Opportunities for Rigor and Student Engagement	52
	Summary of the Discussion	56
V.	CONCLUSION	57
	Research Methodology	57
	Interpretation of the Findings	58
	Limitations of the Study	61
	Comparison to Other Research	62
	Recommendations for Further Research	63
	Summary	64
	WORKS CITED	65
	APPENDIX	
A.	Institutional Review Board (IRB) Documents	69
B.	Research Instrument	73

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE

1.	Participants' Years of Experience Instructing English Learners in Dance.....	32
2.	Most Frequently Used Teaching Strategies for ELs in Dance.....	41
3.	Least Frequently Used Teaching Strategies for ELs in Dance.....	44
4.	Other Teaching Strategies for ELs in Dance.....	47
5.	Participants' Beliefs on the Relevancy of EL-Specific Training to the Dance Classroom on a Scale from 1-10.....	51

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE

1. Environments in Which the EL Teachers Taught 31
2. Instructional Strategies for English Learners and Their Descriptions 37

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Goal of Thesis

Modern trends in American dance education have tended towards an arts-integrated approach, in which critical thinking skills are woven into the practice of movement skills, problem-solving and creative play and away from ‘skill-and-drill’ teacher centered approaches. Dance educators, along with other arts educators, have begun to collaborate with teachers of the educational content areas in science, math, social studies, and English language arts to create lessons which integrate dance and the other arts with academic content. An arts-based method of instruction can allow for rich, challenging exploration of the art form in addition to more in-depth learning in the chosen content area. In a study about the effect of arts-integrated education on memory of science content, Mariale Hardiman et al. wrote, “Memories associated with arts exposure are powerful—arts experiences are thought to elicit emotional cognition, employ creative thinking pathways, and recruit cognitive processes that inherently facilitate long-term recall” (25).

Julia Marshall, arts-integrated researcher and advocate, argued that students need to develop their abilities to grasp complex and often uncertain topics in order to thrive in the modern world. On the topic of complexity and art-centered learning, she noted,

Producing art about a topic is a rich and generative way to apprehend or construct webs of understanding, and therefore, to make meaning. This is because interpreting a topic through art processes invites the artist-learner to think about the topic more deeply, expansively and personally while he or she devises a subjective response to it. Also, since art entails associative thinking strategies, such as constructing analogies and metaphors, a

learner can break away from conventional associations to make oblique connections (partial associations that are unorthodox and surprising, but also make sense) that allow him or her to see something from a different, often new and imaginative perspective. (Marshall 363)

The promise of arts education as a tool for building student understanding is clear. The National Core Arts Standards reflect the trend of holistically supporting students as artists and vice versa. The dance cornerstones as defined by the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards are Creating, Performing, Responding, and Connecting. Each cornerstone requires the ability to communicate through the English language, whether it is through listening, reading, speaking, or writing.

The number two eighth grade Anchor Standard requires students to collaborate with peers and articulate the group processes through spoken language (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, DA:Cr2.1.8). A similar peer-oriented process was described in conjunction with the High School Proficient Standard, along with the added rigor of writing an artistic statement (NCCAS, DA:Cr2.1.1). In the eighth grade standards, students are also guided to “Use genre-specific dance terminology to articulate and justify choices made in movement development to communicate intent. These are skills which require students to listen, process, and communicate their movement’s meaning using both oral and written English and dance vocabulary (NCCAS, DA:Cr1.1.8).

As of 2016 there were 4.9 million students identified as English Learners (ELs) in the United States. Some literature quoted in this thesis may refer to these students simply as “ELLs” or “Limited English Proficiency” students (LEP students). Many educational institutions are moving away from using these terms to both avoid using deficit-based language and reducing people to acronyms. The term “Emerging Bilingual students” was, at the time of this thesis, determined to be the most equitable way to refer to these students. However, for the sake of

clarity and consistency, “English Learners” (ELs) was the primary term used in the writing of this thesis. These are students who are learning English in addition to their native language or other languages they speak at home. These students face the additional trial of acquiring English language skills while trying to simultaneously understand challenging ideas or concepts being taught in their classes.

Author and researcher Joy Janzen, described the linguistic challenges that ELs may face when deciphering their textbooks. Janzen stated, “Through linguistic analysis, Schleppegrell and her colleagues demonstrated that reading and writing in history make unique demands on students in general, and that the language of history textbooks can be very difficult for ELLs in particular” (1013). Similar analysis of math language indicated specific challenges for ELs, “...mathematics may require specialized meanings for words,” and “...it can only be acquired in school and not through conversational interaction” (Janzen 1017).

In addition to academic difficulties, ELs may face anxiety or insecurity related to their language abilities. Janzen described a study by P.A. Duff that found “The ELLs in the study were generally very quiet in class discussions and expressed fear of being ridiculed by native English speakers, who saw them as a silent, undifferentiated mass, ignoring their different backgrounds and personalities” (Janzen 1016).

Generalizing groups of English Learners without consideration for their individual situations is problematic, yet present in much of the academic discourse revolving around ELs. Shawna Shapiro documented ELs’ experiences of encountering this type of ‘deficit discourse’ and found that students “...care deeply about how they are represented at school and in the community” (401). Many of the students involved in the above study felt as if their specialized EL track coursework was exceedingly easy and one student even wondered how they achieved

the grade of A when they still could not read English (396). Shapiro summarized the students' responses when she wrote, "A student who feels unchallenged in the classroom and who faces racist bullying in the hallways may come to see these experiences as mutually reinforcing forms of discrimination" (401). These factors may equate feelings of stress with the concept of school in the mind of English Learners.

Dance class can offer ELs a place to feel successful in the otherwise stressful, and possibly confusing or frustrating environment of school. Marc Richard commented, "Because the language of dance is embodied knowledge, it allows the students to express their knowledge about many subjects through their bodies (9). The simultaneously physical and expressive nature of dance as an art form presents opportunities for ELs to understand a great deal of lesson content without the barrier of language. Researcher and educator Jamie Johnson conducted a study of Chinese ELs' experiences in a college dance course, and expressed her optimism about dance,

Despite the numerous challenges ELLs face, dance instructors can feel reassured by the educative qualities inherent to dance. Dance provides an opportunity for ELLs and native English speakers to uncover personal cultural practices that we often take for granted. (10)

Additionally, of the students that Johnson interviewed, "Almost all interviewees reported feelings of success in a dance technique classroom" (11).

The challenge for ELs arises when they are faced with completing written reflections, understanding verbal corrections or cues, working together with peers, or deciphering the instructions of a creative assignment. Johnson explained that some of the students enrolled in the college dance course were "...under the misconception that there would be limited reading, writing, or speaking" (7). Many students found that the dance-specific vocabulary, such as the French terminology used in ballet, as well as names of body parts and mechanisms were

particularly challenging (Johnson 7). These ELs felt that they could not speak up to answer questions due to lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes that may result in ridicule from their peers (Johnson 7).

Purpose of Study

ELs deserve to have access to rigorous, rich content, regardless of their language level. Pauline Gibbons wrote that “...all students, regardless of social or ethnic background, achieve at higher levels when they participate in an intellectually challenging curriculum,” and that “...equity gaps diminish as a result of engagement in such curricula” (1). In the book *Best Practices in ELL Instruction* by Guofang Li and Patricia A. Edwards, the authors described a successful program that supported ELs in understanding very rigorous aspects of the English language. They wrote:

Instead of diluting course content, instruction focused on “supporting-up” ELL and multilingual students in mainstream language arts classes through continuous instruction in the use of language in *Romeo and Juliet*. Through activities such as inquiries into academic language...student written and produced dramas, and numerous group discussions, the class, including ELLs, was able to access and engage with Shakespeare’s writing. (137)

The consequences of not providing support for ELs is dire. According to the National Education Association (NEA), ELs face a prolific achievement gap and their graduation rate is the lowest of all student subgroups (NEA). In a California based dropout research project titled *The English Learner Dropout Dilemma: Multiple Risks and Multiple Resources*, Rebecca M. Callahan indicated that while there are significant difficulties accurately defining a dropout rate, “...researchers repeatedly show that EL students are more likely to drop out than native English speakers, or even fluent English speaking language minority students” (8).

Arts education has been shown to increase student engagement. Research by the NEA has shown that students with high levels of arts involvement were significantly less likely to drop out

of school than their peers who were not actively involved in the arts at their school (Caterall 14). A research report published by the National Dance Education Organization provided evidence of the value of dance for learners across student subgroups,

This evidence shows that incorporating dance into the curriculum can, among other benefits, improve student test scores, lower drop-out rates, facilitate knowledge transfer, foster teacher morale, and support the learning of underserved populations such as kinesthetic learners, special education students, and minorities. (Bonbright et al. 48-49)

There is potential data for discovering how well arts integrated education impacts the academic performance of ELs. In a study conducted by Karen Marino in 2017, the researcher measured ELs language acquisition growth after participating in a visual art program which was specifically designed to integrate language concepts into creative activities. The researcher concluded that this program had a significant positive impact on the students' English language acquisition since the post-test scores had a mean gain of nearly fifteen points in comparison to the control group scores (50).

Student engagement in the arts has been correlated to higher levels of achievement, civil engagement, and college aspirations (Bonbright et al. 8-9). In fact, "Students who had intensive arts experiences in high school were three times more likely than students who lacked those experiences to earn a bachelor's degree. They were also more likely to earn "mostly A's" in college" (Bonbright et al. 9). This data supported the idea that strategies that engage students the most are of great importance.

In a study which explored the effects of a program called Learning and Achieving Through the Arts (LATA) in the Los Angeles Unified School District, researchers implemented an arts-intensive program which emphasized connections between the arts, literacy, and language. The researchers found that "...the LATA arts integration model has special impact on the ELA development of ELL students," (Peppler et al. 373) and that "ELL treatment students

were significantly more likely than ELL control students to pass the ELA exam in years one-three after participating in the LATA model of arts programming and integration” (Peppler et al. 374).

The above studies are promising, but more research is needed in the field of dance and about the learning level and responses of ELs when they are enrolled in such classes. The research contained in this thesis provided an entry point for understanding basic aspects of ELs’ experiences in the dance classroom and the expert opinions and methods used by the teachers. It is possible the data accumulated in this study could be used to design future studies, professional development courses, or teaching materials for ELs.

Successfully engaging ELs in dance content has the added benefit of creating more young participants and patrons of the art form of dance. English Learners could lend their valuable mindset to the dance world by performing or creating works. The dance world has much to gain from their diverse experiences and perspectives. Evelyn Cisneros, considered the first Hispanic prima ballerina in the United States, found that her uniqueness allowed her to stand out from the others at her ballet school. Cisneros stated, “It was instilled in us at a young age that we were role models for our people. I carried that through my whole life,” and “...I always felt my Mexican heritage gave me a richer well to draw from, not the opposite” (Alba).

Significance of Study

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the number of EL learners in the United States grew by 1.1 million students between fall 2000 and 2016 (NCES “English Language Learners in Public Schools”). The percentage of EL learners increased in forty-three states, with an average of 14.0 percent of total enrollment in cities, 9.3 percent in suburban areas, 6.5 percent in towns, and 3.8 percent in rural areas (NCES “English Language Learners in Public

Schools”). United States Federal law mandates that school districts must provide an equal education for all students, including English Learners.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, “School districts must have qualified EL teachers, staff, and administrators to effectively implement their EL program, and must provide supplemental training when necessary” (“Fact Sheet: Ensuring English Learner Students Can Participate Meaningfully and Equally in Educational Programs”). This does not mean that each school district must provide the same training pertinent to EL learners to all of their teachers. Regulations differ by state and district, and so do EL-specific resources.

Though dance teachers may have received professional development relevant to the needs of ELs from their school or district, this training is often created with the content areas of math, English language arts, science, and social studies in mind. For example, forty-one states and U.S. territories are members of the WIDA Consortium, which “...provides language development resources to those who support the academic success of multilingual learners” (WIDA Mission and History). The five WIDA standards are Social and Instructional Language, Language of Language Arts, Language of Mathematics, Language of Science, and Language of Social Studies (WIDA *English Language Development Standards*).

Dance-specific development centered around the needs and potential of ELs was not available at the time of this study. Case studies such as Jamie Johnson’s titled “Culturally Inclusive Dance: Working with Chinese English Language Learners in the Dance Technique Classroom” contained valuable information about strategies that worked with a particular population at a specific college, but a more comprehensive survey of dance instructors did not exist at the time of this thesis.

Teachers have developed creative and unique strategies for the ELs in their schools, but there has not been research done that compiles this knowledge. The data generated by this study has the potential to be formed into professional development materials for dance teachers. The sharing of resources and strategies could benefit dance educators, administrators, and students.

The researcher created the following essential questions to examine three aspects of instructing ELs in the dance classroom.

- Q1 What specific strategies are currently being utilized by dance teachers to support English Learners in accessing dance-specific language?
- Q2 What are the opportunities for and barriers to incorporating these strategies?
- Q3 Does this teaching process have any effect on student engagement in dance class?

Dance teachers around the country have devised their own specific methods for instructing ELs, or perhaps they have modified methods they learned through generalized professional development experiences. In this study, the researcher aimed to bring together this wealth of knowledge and analyze commonalities and best practices used by dance instructors.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Value of Arts Education

Research into the myriad benefits of arts engagement has shown numerous positive benefits for students. The data yielded by studies of the impact of the arts on young learners show advantages in academic achievement, civic engagement, and positive socio-emotional development, among other effects. Unfortunately, the arts are not available in all American schools. Eighty-two per cent of all high schools in America were estimated to offer at least one arts class in any form of the arts during the 2009-2010 school year (Elpus 14). Formal dance instruction was especially rare and was found to be present in only 12% of secondary schools during the same time period. (Elpus 4).

Art educators have long argued for the benefits of the arts on students' cognitive, academic, social, and emotional development. Data exist that suggest positive correlations between music education and students' grades, IQ tests, and executive functioning (Winsler et al. 3). Art electives in school are beneficial for a variety of reasons, including student engagement. Winsler et al. wrote that "Arts electives give students the opportunity to explore and express their emotions in a creative and productive way" and "Arts classes present students with additional ways to relate and engage in school, which can lead to lower levels of drop-out and criminal activity" (Winsler et al. 4).

Arts-integrated education refers to arts instruction which aims to incorporate and teach about content from the traditional academic areas such as math, science, social studies, and

English language arts. This method of arts education may include collaboration between content area teachers and arts teachers. “Arts integration has also been described as promoting the effective transfer of knowledge and skills from arts to non-arts domains and to help students draw connections among different disciplines” (Hardiman et al. 26). This instructional approach to arts education has been shown to be particularly effective in increasing student engagement and memory of academic content (Hardiman et al. 31). Whether students are receiving arts instruction in a traditional or integrated instructional model, the benefits appear to be copious and diverse.

Academic Impacts of Arts Education

One of the most compelling areas of research into the intersection of the arts and education relates to the positive effect of student engagement in the arts on academic achievement. Several studies have suggested a correlation between high academic achievement and engagement in the arts. The SAT Reasoning test is an exam that many American universities factor into admissions decisions, and is of great importance to those concerned with college readiness. Sandra Ruppert noted that:

Multiple independent studies have shown increased years of enrollment in arts courses are positively correlated with higher SAT verbal and math scores. High school students who take arts classes have higher math and verbal SAT scores than students who take no arts classes. Arts participation and SAT scores co-vary—that is, they tend to increase linearly: the more arts classes, the higher the scores. (9)

One may argue that this data is skewed because students who had the means to attend schools which offered arts programs may be of higher socioeconomic status and therefore more likely to achieve higher scores on standardized tests. While this certainly may be true, James Caterall found that arts engagement held specific benefits for students of low socioeconomic background as well. Regardless of socioeconomic background, Caterall discovered that “...high

school seniors with arts-rich backgrounds were significantly more likely than students with less arts exposure to belong to academic honor societies” (17). In a 2005 study, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds with high arts involvement had higher grade point averages than the overall sample of students from all socioeconomic backgrounds (Caterall 13). Though socioeconomic background is still a very important factor in determining a student’s likelihood to succeed in school and college, the data collected by Caterall showed that involvement in the arts contributed to a more equitable environment for students from all backgrounds.

For English Learners in particular, arts-integrated education holds great promise. Karen Marino devised a study in which she quantitatively analyzed the work of a group of English Learners. Marino determined that their participation in an arts intervention program that specifically targeted English language acquisition positively impacted their growth and ability to use the English language. According to a statistical analysis of EL’s performance on their English language acquisition exams compared to a control group, “...the study found that participating in the art program contributed positively toward increasing the post-test scores” (49). More specifically, all ELs in the study experienced growth, but the students who received the arts intervention gained more than those who did not. It was found that even though all students across the school improved their English proficiency levels, those who participated in the arts program showed English Language Arts gains that “...were specific only to whether they participated in the art program” (Marino 49-50).

Developing English Language Literacy Through the Arts, or DELLTA, is an arts integration program in New York City in partnership with the non-profit organization ArtsConnection. The DELLTA program contributed additional data for the positive benefits of arts instruction for English Learners. It was reported that, “After 3 years of participation,

DELLTA students scored 75.5% higher on state ELA tests than a matched comparison group from elementary schools with similar % of students that are ELL, Special Ed, Black/Hispanic and Title I eligible” (NYC DOE 2). This statistic not only supported correlations between the arts and general academic achievement, but indicated there were specific benefits for English Learners.

Non-Academic Advantages of Arts Education for Students

It would be remiss not to mention the benefits of arts education that lie outside the realm of academic achievement. Though it is difficult to quantify benefits such as student engagement or learner self-efficacy, research has regardless pointed to the positive effects of arts engagement on students’ character, attendance rates, and confidence.

In a study conducted by Athena Nichols in 2015, high school students recorded the specific ways in which they experienced arts classes. “ Student participants included effort, choice, freedom, practice, performance, creativity, individuality, self-expression, encouragement, interest, assistance, self-motivation, and pride in their descriptions of their experiences of active engagement in arts classes” (Nichols 138). Additional data from this study revealed “...those students that participated in the study were more pleased and confident about their abilities to perform well in arts versus non-arts classes,” (Nichols 136). Creative tasks that require students to look at complex ideas with fresh perspectives help them construct their own meaning and allow for interpretations that do not fall within the categories of ‘right and wrong.’ By that measure, students feel confident and proud of the work they contribute in their arts courses.

Greater attendance rates are yet another added benefit of arts education. “One utterly obvious statistic, repeated again and again in the literature, is that when the arts are a major part

of the school experience, students' attendance rates rise dramatically, and so, too, that of the teachers" (Bonbright 18).

Though it is hard to measure character development, research by Sandra Ruppert revealed that aside from academic achievement, "The high arts-involved students also watched fewer hours of TV, participated in more community service, and reported less boredom in school" (8). These aspects of the research indicated that students were more civically active, attentive, and productive as a result of involvement in arts activities.

Benefits of Dance for Students

It is clear that the arts provide innumerable benefits for students in school, however, not all methods of arts expression are identical. Dance in particular allows for students to foster a connection between their minds and bodies through a physical expression of ideas that transcends language. It is highly visual yet experiential. Dance offers students an opportunity to generate new movement, making meaning out of academic content and abstracting it to weave those movements together to form a dance.

In a 2012 qualitative case study, Alison Leonard presented anecdotal evidence that students in a dance intervention displayed and utilized higher-order thinking skills. She summarized:

The students in the program integrated curricular concepts in sophisticated and intellectual ways, exhibiting complex, higher order thinking skills. For example, the students exhibited complex representations of ideas such as creating new movement, demonstrating originality, fluency, and problem-solving skills versus repeating what was modeled. (67).

Leonard also noted that, "When the students danced their abstracted phrases, they were taking content, using knowledge, and not only applying it to dance, they were creating new knowledge through the dance" (158-159).

Young students have a natural inclination for movement, often finding more joy in wiggling than in sitting still. This makes early reading instruction difficult due to the repetitive practice and concentration required to master certain reading skills. The Basic Reading Through Dance study, conducted by Susan D. McMahon in Chicago, IL, was designed to provide targeted dance interventions which supported crucial reading skills such as letter recognition and phonics. In this study, students were guided to make name dances, move through letter shapes and sounds, and practice flowing from one letter to another using methods similar to the way one blends sounds during reading. The effect on student's reading abilities was overwhelmingly positive.

McMahon stated:

The program was so successful in the areas of consonants, vowels, and overall phoneme segmentation, that BRD [Basic Reading Through Dance] students started out lower than control students and then actually performed better than the control students on the posttest. In 3 months of first-grade reading instruction, the program took low-performing readers and turned them into significantly better readers (119).

Older students can benefit from dance instruction integrated into traditional academic content, too. Arianne MacBean documented her high school students' experiences as they developed their writing through their dance choreography, and also created choreography based on their writing. Bonbright summarized that students were able to clarify their ideas and develop a strong sense of identity through dancing their writing (15). Bonbright went on to assert that "The two studies demonstrate that [an] authentic dance study can impact learning in and about written language and text, despite being an entirely different modality" (15). These findings seem to point to dance, movement, and kinesthetic learning in general as being helpful in facilitating deeper understandings of academic work.

Supporting English Learners

By 2017, one out of every ten public school students in the United States was learning how to speak English in addition to learning complex content. Culturally, these learners are a diverse group, the largest percentage of which are Spanish speakers (Sanchez). Other commonly spoken home languages of English Learners are Chinese, Vietnamese, and Arabic (Sanchez.).

Despite their differences, English Learners are often grouped together in one category, and unfortunately the statistics on their progress are disparaging. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that, “Achievement gaps between ELLs and non-ELs are deeply rooted, pervasive, complex, and challenging. As a group, ELLs face some of the most pronounced achievement gaps of any student groups” (National Education Organization 3).

The report *Understanding the Gaps: Who Are We Leaving Behind – And How Far?* revealed that, “In 2013, students demonstrated proficiency levels that were 23 to 30 percentage points below their English speaking peers, with only 3 to 4 percent of ELL eighth graders demonstrating proficiency in math or reading” (NEO 3). This statistic, among others, clearly showed that this group of diverse learners were not receiving the support they needed in order to be successful in school. Due to their diversity as a subgroup, there is no simple answer available to lessen the achievement gaps ELs face.

The complexity of this matter grows when one factors in the disparity in education legislation between states in the United States. Although the United States Federal Government passed legislation which enforces equitable education for English Learners and their families, concrete policies were not described. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA) required public schools to ensure that EL students participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs, but specific EL supports

vary from state to state. The federal government has offered recommendations and guidance for states and school districts, but the words meaningfully and equally was left to be interpreted by whichever governing body controls education legislation in any given state.

A Summary of Key Research

Despite the unique challenges presented by the diversity of English Learners combined with a lack of concrete educational reform, researchers have pointed to solutions that could address the achievement gap.

High Support, High Challenge

Much of current educational theory rests broadly on the work of Vygotsky, who developed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky purported that effective teaching consists of learning opportunities that are slightly too difficult for students to do on their own, but easy enough for them to do with assistance (Wass & Golding 671).

Mariani further developed this theory by creating a framework which outlined four zones of learning: high-challenge and high-support, high-challenge and low-support, low-challenge and high-support, as well as low-challenge and low-support (9). While a low-challenge classroom with low-support may foster apathy or boredom, high-challenge and low-support is not desirable either because students may become frustrated and give up. A high-challenge classroom with a great deal of support for students is the ideal environment for productive, meaningful learning for all learners. In her book *English Learners Academic Literacy and Thinking*, Pauline Gibbons explained:

Newmann et al. (1996) have presented three significant findings in relation to raising levels of academic achievement and intellectual quality: first, that students from all backgrounds are more engaged when classroom work is cognitively challenging than when it consists solely of conventional low-level work; second, that all students, regardless of social or ethnic background, achieve at higher levels when they participate

in an intellectually challenging curriculum; and third, that equity gaps diminish as a result of engagement in such curricula. (1-2)

Gibbons referred to the term “scaffolding,” to describe methods which help students complete their challenging work. Scaffolding refers to a variety of educational techniques which are used to help students progress toward a stronger understanding of content accompanied by increasing independence while learning. It is intended to be temporary, and “...assists a learner to move toward new concepts, levels of understanding, and new language (Gibbons 15). One of the major purposes of scaffolding is that it purposefully sets students up to be autonomous, so that they may successfully complete higher-order academic tasks with less and less support as they progress in their acquisition of academic language. The ultimate purpose of scaffolds is that they are temporary and future-oriented, meant to be removed so that the learner may stand and progress on their own.

Transfer

Transfer, or language transfer, often specifically refers to knowledge or skills that carry over from a student’s first language to their second language. This is an especially important concept to understand when instructing English Learners. Li and Edwards wrote:

With respect to English learners, a substantial body of research reviewed by both CREDE [Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence] and NLP [Natural Language Processing] researchers suggests that literacy and other skills and knowledge transfer across languages; that is, if you learn something in one language, such as decoding, comprehension skills, or a concept such as “democracy,” you either already know it in (i.e., transfer it to) another language, or you can more easily learn it in another language. (23)

Transfer or building upon the knowledge that students already possess and leveraging their existing understandings is a teaching technique that was emphasized again and again in the education literature. Successful teachers develop and utilize students’ background knowledge before having them study a text or skill, and a variety of teaching techniques can be used during

this process. For ELs, visual charts, images, videos, drawings and acting based on concepts to be learned can be particularly effective. These teaching approaches allow students to demonstrate what they already know about a given topic without needing to explain it in their second language.

Both language and content instruction should be implemented simultaneously in the classroom to allow for knowledge and skill transfer. Gibbons posited that:

Language and content cannot be separated: concepts and knowledge on the one hand, and subject-specific language, literacy, and vocabulary on the other are interdependent... In an integrated program, language learning and subject learning can therefore be mutually supportive of each other and provide for the natural 'recycling' of language and concepts so important for EL learners. (10-11)

Culturally responsive teaching uses language and knowledge transfer as a fulcrum for improving relationships, encouraging equity, as well as boosting student achievement. This method of teaching also includes connecting lessons to a student's cultural background, and drawing upon the wealth of knowledge that students already possess. Culturally responsive teachers seek to understand the social and cultural information that shape their student's outlook, and view student's experiences as valuable material that can enrich classroom learning. Brayboy and Castagno wrote about culturally responsive educators who instruct Native American students:

The transmission of dominant cultural knowledge and norms occurs on a daily basis in U.S. schools, but the consistent message in much of the research on culturally responsive education is that successful teachers of Indigenous youth also work to transmit values, beliefs, knowledge, and norms that are consistent with their students' home communities. (37)

When one stumbles across the term transfer in EL literature, it is often used to advocate for bilingual education, in which students are educated in both their home language and their new language. However, transfer in a broader sense can refer to the transmission of knowledge

and experience between languages, or even between academic content areas. Transfer certainly occurs between art courses and core content subjects, especially in arts-integrated education, and is important for inclusion in a dance teacher's tool box of teaching strategies.

Sheltered Instruction

Sheltered Instruction is an instructional framework which "...is designed to provide second language learners with the same high-quality, academically challenging content that native English speakers receive" (Hansen-Thomas 166). This end is achieved by a variety of educational approaches, such as cooperative learning activities, the utilization of an ELs first language, incorporating a plethora of teaching materials which are hands-on and/or visual, explicit instruction of learning strategies, and using content designed to build on students' existing background knowledge (Hansen-Thomas 166).

Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) is a program which helps schools implement and assess teachers' use of sheltering techniques. In a study based on this program, the data showed that the students of teachers who were SIOP-trained outperformed those whose teachers were not trained in and using this teaching technique (Hansen-Thomas 166).

Another aspect of sheltered instruction is that it is intended to occur during all parts of a student's day, not just in specifically-targeted English Language Acquisition classes or blocks. Students must be explicitly instructed in how to use the language required in their content-area classes. For example, science writing contains the use of passive voice and past participle verb tenses, such as "...the solution was handled with gloves." This grammatical structure is advanced and can present additional confusion or challenge for ELs.

Hansen-Thomas wrote about sheltered instruction in the following statement. "Because many integral features of sheltered instruction mirror general best teaching practices, good

teachers who use a variety of techniques to make content clear are already on their way to implementing sheltered instruction in their classes” (167). The sentiment here is that sheltered instruction is just plain good teaching.

Some examples of sheltering techniques include visual organizers such as Venn diagrams, thinking sheets, word walls, crosswords, and paragraphs with deleted words called cloze exercises. Co-writing, in which the teacher and students work together to create an original passage, is a method which supports peer-paired work and is another sheltered teaching technique. EL teachers can also shelter their students by speaking simply, and removing idioms, slang, and cultural references from their instructional language. The list of strategic sheltering techniques goes on, but most of the literature focused on building skills that pertain to English language arts, math, science, and social studies. A comprehensive study that examines which sheltering strategies work best in art classes was not found at the time of this thesis, echoing the need for more research in this area.

Instructing English Learners in the Dance Classroom

The dance classroom is a place of potential for English Learners. To begin, it can be a space for the imagination to thrive. When creating dances, there are no incorrect answers, no precise solutions. Additionally, performing dance is a method of expression that does not require (though sometimes may include) the production of written or spoken language. Yet, it is also a place of rigor. The challenge of consciously arranging one’s movement ideas or chosen concepts into an abstract presentation of dance requires many higher-order thinking tasks such as problem-solving, categorization and critical thinking. Students who may struggle to make their meanings known in English, or who feel discomfort doing so, may thrive in such an environment.

*The Developing English Language
Literacy Through the Arts
Program*

Developing English Language Literacy Through the Arts (DELLTA) is a school residency model created by the nonprofit organization ArtsConnection in New York City. The program is designed to utilize teaching strategies which target and support language development for ELs through the use of dance and theater classes. Teachers also receive professional development from DELLTA, with specific focus on the use of video assessment, identifying students' strengths and weaknesses, and developing cross-disciplinary teaching strategies.

A study which was conducted over 10 years in public elementary and middle schools in New York City produced data about the DELLTA model. Eight hundred thirty-seven students who were designated as EL students received up to 25 weeks of theater or dance instruction from visiting dance or theater artists (Horowitz 1). Classroom teachers, ESL instructors, and the visiting teaching artists partnered to collaborate and devise ways to extend the arts learning into ongoing language learning (Horowitz 2).

The New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) was used as a tool to quantitatively measure students' language acquisition in the study. A control group was selected that matched the DELLTA students' socio-economic status, and contained students in the same public school system with similar NYSESLAT scores. The test scores showed that the students who participated in the DELLTA program performed significantly better than the comparison group in the NYSESLAT (Horowitz 2).

The Classroom Assessment of Learning and Teaching (CALT) was also used to assess other skills related to academic achievement. Use of the CALT showed that student achievement among DELLTA students was strongest in motivation, perseverance/task persistence, ability to

focus, ownership of learning, spatial awareness, self-confidence, and cooperative learning skills/collaboration (Horowitz 4).

Horowitz supplied a theory for why the students who received the dance and theater classes were so successful for participating ELs:

Most likely, the DELTA students acquired English skills through using language in an engaging, authentic context that they cared about. The students were committed to their artistic projects and employed English for a purpose that they were personally invested in. This sharply contrasted with other, non-arts, school tasks designed to support English language acquisition, such as rote drills and test preparation. Students are more likely to acquire and apply English when they care about the content they are trying to express. (17).

Taped interviews and recorded footage of the DELTA students reinforced Horowitz's conclusions. One video represented the growth of a student named Jia-Xing, who was a first-year English language learner in a public school in Queens, NY, and a naturally gifted dancer. In a taped interview, Jia-Xing's classroom teacher described his growth, stating that he was using his English language skills as well as the dance techniques and language to support his thinking and provide feedback to his peers. ("Developing English Language Skills through Dance")

Another video from the DELTA program demonstrated the methods that two teaching artists used to explicitly teach dance vocabulary. Together, the students and the teachers co-created vocabulary charts and physically represented each vocabulary word in their bodies. Aida Groby, a fifth grade teacher, explained that for the students, contextualizing the words in a real situation allowed them to transfer the word to other settings or other content areas where the same word may appear again. She went on to emphasize that the process of actually using the word in real life made it more authentic and helped them learn ("Using Charts and Visual Aids in Dance Class").

In the same video, a student described encountering the dance vocabulary words in math class. The word ‘sequence,’ which the student had learned in relation to a dance step called ‘café con pan,’ was also heard in the students’ math class when he found a pattern in a math problem. The student then described the dance step in detail to demonstrate his understanding of the use of sequence and pattern.

The quantitative and qualitative data presented by the DELTA program are of high quality and show great promise for English Learners. How this type of program may impact high school EL learners is a question left to be considered.

*A Study of Chinese English Learners
in the Dance Classroom*

In an article titled *Culturally Inclusive Dance: Working with Chinese English Language Learners in the Dance Classroom*, Jamie Johnson interviewed Chinese English Learners to discover more about their experiences and challenges taking a college dance elective. Johnson’s perspective was that “...language and movement intersect within individuals, contribute to their cultural understanding, and thereby affect their approaches to thinking and learning (4). Though Johnson was a professor at the university, the students she interviewed attended classes that were instructed by other professors. After the interviews took place, Johnson purposefully planned strategies based on the students’ reported difficulties and implemented them into her own dance classes. She also shared her personal reflections about how the students responded to these interventions.

There were several themes drawn from the student interviews in the above study, one of which was the cultural difference between Chinese and American educational environments. The Chinese students’ experiences of classroom learning in was primarily teacher-centered, and they had difficulty transferring to the learner-centered participation which was expected of them in

their dance experiences in America (Johnson 7). Some participants had previously attended dance classes in China, and reported that the instruction they experienced in those dance classrooms were also teacher-centered. They also revealed that their dance teachers in China were very strict, and that the focus of the students was to mimic the instructor (Johnson 6).

Another cultural difference reported was that in China, shyness or reticence to participate was nurtured and reinforced through the pedagogical style (Johnson 6). Students found that having to express their own style, make bold artistic choices, and being observed by classmates were all new experiences for them (Johnson 6).

Interviewees also mentioned that they self-segregated, meaning that they often spent more time with other Chinese English Learners. If there was something in the class that they did not understand, they asked other English Learners in Mandarin if they understood what was happening. Though this is a natural tendency, Johnson noted, “There appears to be a correlation between the amount of students’ time in an English-speaking environment, their willingness to put themselves in situations where they are forced to use English, and their resulting cultural and linguistic proficiency (Johnson 7).

The participants reported difficulties with vocabulary in the dance classes, especially in regards to the French terminology used in ballet class. Body parts, anatomy, as well as body mechanisms were among other terms that English Learners found challenging (Johnson 7).

There were several teaching approaches suggested by ELs in the study, such as clarifying and modeling expectations for participation, and providing opportunities for students to work with non-ELs. The participants mentioned that vocabulary handouts or writing terms on a whiteboard would be a great help to them (Johnson 9). Encouraging words of affirmation spoken by a professor, and taking time to learn everyone’s name was reported to have alleviated self-

conscious feelings among the participants. One student pointed out that it was very overwhelming for him to produce sentences from open ended questions and that oral multiple choice questions would have given him an opportunity to better display his knowledge (Johnson 9).

From the suggestions generated by the study participants, Johnson implemented a number of strategies into her own dance classes. First, she assessed the level of the ELs proficiency in her class through peer introductions and low-stakes in-class free writing activities. She also created clearly structured opportunities to participate with the goal of gradually shifting the environment from teacher-centered to student-centered. For example, at the beginning of the week, she set a full class. On the second and third day, she announced the exercises and ask for volunteers to demonstrate them, with varying degrees of success. She supported the volunteers in remembering the combinations on these days. On the final day of the week, she assigned each exercise to a student, and gave students five minutes to remember or reconstruct the exercises with partners. This activity is an example of a high-challenge, high-support classroom (Johnson 9). Johnson wrote:

As students became familiar with this class structure, their anxiety abated, and they began to look forward to the challenge of the activity. In this manner, a full demonstration of the physicality of the movement and effort was completed, the participation expectations were clarified, and students were eased into student-centered engagement. (9)

To address issues of self-segregation, Johnson gave students opportunities to work in pairs, with the added suggestion of finding partners they didn't usually work with. She also provided students with conversation starters, and explained, "The prompt might be something as simple as, 'What happens after the roll to floor?' or it might encourage qualitative explorations like, 'Discuss with your partner ways to alter time in this phrase'" (10).

Facilitation with vocabulary acquisition included writing words on a white board, as well as providing an anatomy map with words printed in English and Mandarin. Students were encouraged to bring journals and were given opportunities to write vocabulary and reflections in them at any time during the class (Johnson 10).

Johnson concluded the article by summarizing the implications of the study and outlined the methods which were most successful for students:

The select group of Chinese ELLs interviewed for this study reflect the belief that dance educators can play a powerful role in linguistic and cultural integration. By focusing on modeling, clarifying expectations, and facilitating interaction between ELLs and native English speakers, dance instructors can help address students' vocabulary limitations, misunderstandings of classroom participation, and their disconnects with colloquialisms. (11)

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Preparation for the Study

The following chapter presents the methods used to conduct research in order to answer the essential questions presented in Chapter I:

- Q1 What specific strategies are currently being utilized by dance teachers to support ELs in accessing dance-specific language?
- Q2 What are the opportunities for and barriers to incorporating these strategies?
- Q3 Does this teaching process have any effect on student engagement in dance class?

The goals of the thesis, descriptions of the participants, as well as the proposed methods for data collection, handling, and analysis were presented to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Northern Colorado. This submission also included the study's purpose, possible risks and benefits, and copies of the research instruments used. Samples of consent and assent letters were provided in the thesis IRB application as well.

The Research Context

In this study the researcher initially proposed including two groups of participants: teachers who had experience instructing English Learners in dance content, and students who were English Learners who attended dance class at their school. The researcher felt that including voices of English Learners was valuable for the purposes of this study, and important in order to answer the third essential question. Connections with two high school dance teachers were established in order for the researcher to be able to schedule in-person interviews with their students. Before permission could be ascertained from the respective schools' principals, student

participants and their guardians, each school district needed to first approve the research project. The school districts required the researcher to submit a thesis narrative application similar to that required by University of Northern Colorado's IRB. This application included samples of the consent and assent letters, research instruments, the purpose and goals of the study as well as the research questions.

Challenges Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the process of ascertaining approval from school districts, the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. This worldwide pandemic affected the way that schools operated, effectively closing school doors for in-person learning in the school districts in which the research was supposed to take place. The request to conduct research was denied by the districts in the best interest of children, staff, and members of the school districts' respective communities. Thus, it was not possible for the researcher to interview the student participants of this study. As a result, the researcher looked for evidence which answered the third essential question within the data generated by the teacher participant group.

The Participants' Experiences

The participants for this study were teachers who had experience instructing ELs in dance content. A brief description of the study was posted on the National Dance Education Organization's online community forums by the researcher's advisor, Sandra Minton, PhD. Participants were also found through similar means on Facebook groups for dance educators. The researcher reached out to her personal network of professional dancers, dance educators, and former dance professors to find participants as well. In addition, these connections were extended to the researcher's alumni organizations for Interlochen Arts Academy and State University of New York at Purchase. The participants were all given a brief description of the

study, and were then directed to the consent letter so they could learn about the study, give their consent and then complete the online survey. A total of 30 dance educators participated in the research study.

The Teaching Environments

The participants all taught dance to ELs in a variety of different environments. On the survey, they were invited to select all environments that applied to their teaching experience. Based on these responses, 55.27% of the dance teachers involved in the study indicated that they had experience teaching dance to ELs in public schools, 7.89% of the teachers recorded experience teaching dance in charter schools, and 5.26% taught dance in private school environments. Other survey responses indicated that 10.53% of the participants instructed dance in private dance studios, 10.53% taught dance as part of an arts outreach organization, and four teachers specified that they taught dance to ELs in other environments not described above. Those teaching at private studios, outreach organizations or in other environments made up 10.53% of the participant experiences in each of these environments. The environments in which the teachers worked is presented more specifically in Table 1.

Table 1

Environments in Which the EL Dance Teachers Taught

Teaching Environments	Percentage of Teachers	Answer Count
Public Elementary (K-5)	26.32	10
Public Secondary (6-12)	28.95	11
Charter Elementary (K-5)	5.26	2
Charter Secondary (6-12)	2.63	1
Private Elementary (K-5)	5.26	2
Private Secondary (6-12)	0	0
Private Studio	10.53	4
As part of an arts outreach organization	10.53	4
Other environment	10.53	4

Years of Teaching Experience

Participants reported the number of years of experience they had instructing ELs in dance content. A majority of the participant group had more than four years of experience, with 40% of the teachers reporting six or more years of experience. In contrast, 16% of the participants reported less than one year of experience teaching EL students, 20% reported 1-3 years, and 24% reported 4-6 years. These percentages are illustrated in figure 1 below.

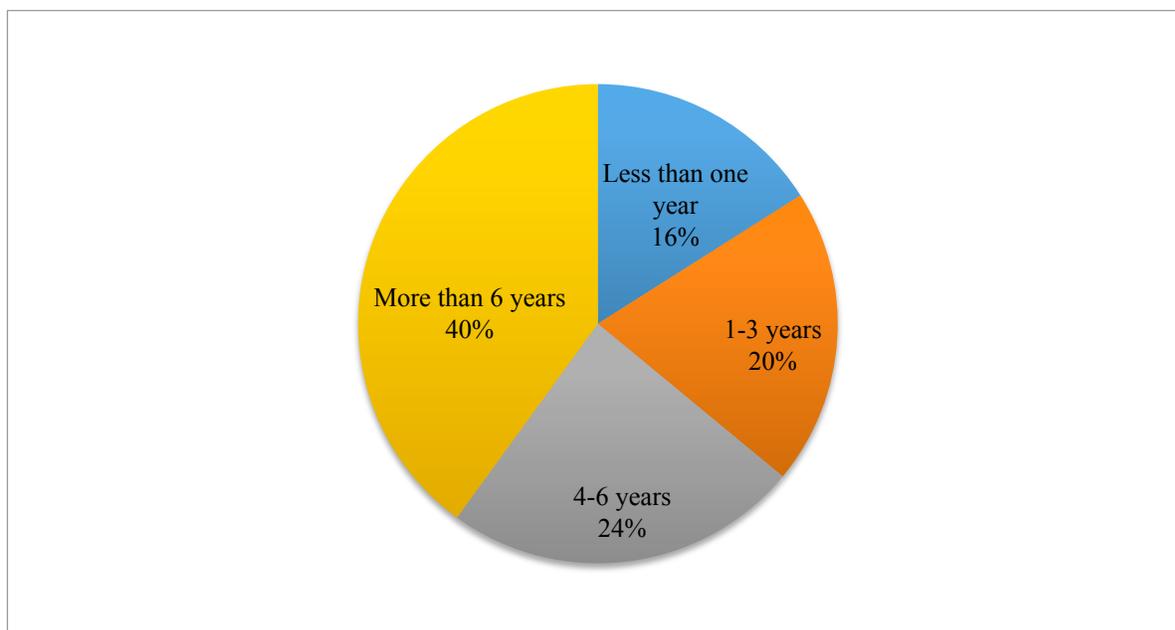


Figure 1: Participants' Years of Experience Instructing English Learners in Dance.

The Research Instrument

The following paragraphs describe procedures which were used to obtain participant consent and the nature of the survey that was used in this study.

The Teacher Survey

The participants accessed an online survey which was designed using Qualtrics through the University of Northern Colorado. This survey was comprised of twelve questions. Prior to opening the survey, participants were directed to a consent letter which described the content of the study, and enabled dance teachers to provide consent and participate by clicking through to the survey. Participants' responses were confidential.

Survey questions pertaining to years of teaching experience and teaching environments, which are discussed above, gave context and insight into the participants' involvement in teaching ELs in dance. The researcher also wanted to determine if the teachers had ever received training on

how to better support ELs, and if they felt this training was pertinent to the dance classroom. In addition, there was a question related to content and language objectives in lesson plans.

Participants also answered questions about the opportunities for and barriers to instructing ELs in dance, and whether they felt it was part of their job to help ELs acquire language in their classroom. Participants were asked to describe what benefits they felt dance had for ELs as well. Third, participants were asked to rate the frequency at which they used specific teaching methods when instructing ELs. Finally, the researcher investigated which methods were deemed best practices for instructing ELs in the general content classrooms. This latter investigation was used to generate this last part of the survey. After reading through each teaching technique and an example of the technique in practice, participants chose one of three options: “I do not use this strategy or refer to this resource often,” “I sometimes use this strategy or refer to this resource,” or “I use this resource or refer to this strategy often, or as much as possible.” A copy of the consent letter and survey can be found in Appendix B.

The Data Analysis

The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the data gathered in this research study. Most of the data accumulated was analyzed using qualitative methods.

Qualitative Analysis

The survey was completed online by the participants using Qualtrics software provided by University of Northern Colorado. The researcher exported the data into Microsoft Excel forms, and also viewed the data in Microsoft Word. The data provided by the study was descriptive due to the open-ended nature of the questions. Most of the data was qualitatively

analyzed by the researcher. The researcher looked for commonalities that emerged within the participants' responses, and identified themes or disparities within the answers.

Quantitative Analysis

The nature of some of the questions on the survey allowed for data to be analyzed quantitatively. These questions provided strict parameters for the participants' answers. One question allowed participants to rate the relevancy of EL-specific training they had received. Some of these questions included rating how often participants used specific teaching methods. Qualtrics allowed for the data to be displayed in a variety of ways, such as in bar graphs and pie charts. The researcher was also able to see the mean and median answers for these types of questions.

Defining Student Engagement

The third essential question in this thesis pertains to student engagement. Student interviews were planned in order to shed light upon this question. As discussed above, the researcher could not complete these student interviews due to the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore the researcher gleaned information about student engagement from the data found within the teachers' responses in the survey. Student engagement was defined as a students' general motivation, interest, curiosity, and investment in content matter. Student engagement looks different across developmental periods of a child's life. The book *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*, edited by Sandra Christenson et al. served as a compass for understanding student engagement in analyzing this data.

Summary of the Methodology

This chapter outlined the methods that the researcher used to investigate three essential questions about English Learners in the dance classroom as stated above. A survey was extended

to thirty dance educators who had experience instructing English Learners in dance content in various contexts. The participants' answers were confidential. Most of the data produced by the research study was descriptive in nature, and was analyzed qualitatively. There was also quantitative data produced by some of the answers in the survey. Themes which emerged from the qualitative data and the analysis of the quantitative data informed the researcher's quest to answer the essential questions. Outcomes of the analysis of the responses to the survey questions are addressed in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify which strategies were used most commonly by dance instructors who taught EL students, and to determine barriers to and opportunities for increasing rigor in dance for ELs. It was also to examine what effect this teaching process had on the EL students' engagement in dance learning. In the following chapter the researcher discussed the data generated by the research survey in order to answer the essential questions presented in the Introduction chapter. Some of the data were analyzed quantitatively, however most of the data were descriptive in nature and thus were analyzed qualitatively.

Specific Strategies Used by Dance Teachers

Teachers involved in this research study were asked to identify and describe up to three strategies that they used most frequently in providing quality instruction for ELs. The teachers were also asked to rate a list of common strategies which are often cited as useful for ELs in the general content classroom. They chose one of three options for each strategy, "I do not use this strategy or refer to this resource often," "I sometimes use this strategy or refer to this resource," or "I use this resource or refer to this strategy often, or as much as possible." Each strategy was accompanied by a description of the strategy in practice. These strategies are shown in Table 2 and are described in more detail below.

Table 2

Instructional Strategies for English Learners and Their Descriptions

Strategy	Description
Visuals	Accompanying your content or meaning with pictures, gestures, or real objects
Objectives	Communicating both language and content objectives to students
Word Wall	A physical display which contains target vocabulary words related to the content being taught
First Language Instruction	Explaining concepts, ideas, or vocabulary in the ELs first language or in a language other than English
Modeling	Modeling the genre of writing to be accomplished in dance class. If the class is writing personal reflections in a journal, this includes modeling how someone may write a personal reflection by co-constructing a sample journal entry with the class
Cultural Inclusion	Integrating content that is related to the culture of ELs first language, or giving ELs opportunities to share their culture with the class
Graphic Organizers	Visual aids that students can use to help them understand relationships between content knowledge. These could include Venn diagrams or guided note templates for students to use when watching videos
Simple English	Implementing conscious efforts to simplify the language you use to instruct by removing idioms, slang, cultural references, or stand-alone advanced vocabulary
Peer Learning	Pairing ELs with native English speakers during group work
Increasing Wait Time	Giving ELs more time to answer questions

The above strategies are thought to be effective for supporting ELs in accessing grade level content in a rigorous way. Visuals may help students better understand content because they are able to connect to prior knowledge about the concept in their first language by looking at a picture, video, or a real item that represents the concept. This helps reinforce language transfer, which was discussed above in the second chapter of this thesis.

Content objectives are found in most classrooms, but some schools also require language objectives which serve to drive explicit language learning in the content area. An example of a content objective in dance may be: “Students will be able to create a dance with a partner that includes one movement each on a high level, a medium level, and a low level,” while an accompanying language objective could be “Students can define the word “level” in the context of dance.” Adding a language objective to accompany content objectives could serve dual purposes: to increase the rigor for ELs in the dance classroom, and to get the teacher thinking strategically about how to create language learning opportunities for ELs. As mentioned before in Chapter II, rigorous content learning is vital for EL student engagement.

A word wall may support English Learners because it is a physical display that features prominent vocabulary used in the dance classroom. Because it is ever-present, students know where to look to find vocabulary they need to talk, read, listen, and write about dance. This could serve to help reinforce important vocabulary and create a text-rich environment for the learner.

First language instruction refers to explaining concepts, ideas, or vocabulary in the students’ first language. This, of course, could happen if a teacher speaks the students’ first language, but teachers may also employ technology such as translation applications or websites to provide this kind of instruction. This helps promote language transfer because it ensures that the student understands which concept is being taught, and they are then able to transfer the knowledge they have from their first language to English.

Modeling language activities may help English Learners work independently on a writing task. To model a language activity such as a journal activity, teachers could show students how to complete a journal entry on a large piece of chart paper or a white board while students follow along in their own journals. In the above example, the teacher may show where and how to write

the date, and how to begin the journal entry. The teacher might specifically explain what kind of writing can be found in a journal entry, and provide a sentence stem such as “dancing like ___ made me feel ___ because _____,” which caters to the specific writing task. This strategy may provide more support for ELs to complete independent writing activities because the teacher demonstrates the process of building English sentences to describe dancing in real time.

Cultural inclusion involves integrating content that is related to the culture of ELs first language, or giving ELs opportunities to share their culture with the class. This strategy can be useful for English Learners because it builds student investment and excitement. It also reorganizes the dynamic of power within the classroom, in which the EL student has more expertise in the subject than the teacher. The student would explain and teach, in English, about something to which they have deep cultural connections. This strategy builds on the concepts of language transfer and also may reduce the risk of reducing ELs to one homogenous group.

Graphic organizers used in the classroom for ELs are examples of sheltered instruction, which was discussed in Chapter II of this thesis. These organizers, which may include Venn diagrams, guided note templates, and differentiated handouts may be beneficial because they support ELs when taking notes. In the dance classroom, students may take notes when watching dances, or when learning about a new dance concept or genre. These graphic organizers may give the EL learner more guidance into which concepts and vocabulary are most important for them to remember.

Simple English refers to teachers implementing conscious efforts to simplify the language they use to instruct students by removing idioms, slang, American cultural references, or stand-alone advanced vocabulary. This strategy might help English Learners because the language they are hearing is more economical in nature and easier to understand. Idioms and

slang may confuse ELs or they may become lost in complex sentences or vocabulary. Removing such language from lectures may increase English Learners' ability to grasp content.

Peer learning occurs when ELs are paired with native English speakers during collaborative activities. Many researchers believe that students learn a lot from each other, and are more motivated to participate when they work together. Pairing ELs with native English speakers may be beneficial because native speakers could provide needed language support for their EL peers.

Increasing wait time for ELs simply refers to giving ELs more time to process and answer oral questions. This may be beneficial because some ELs translate sentences in their head from their native language before they try saying something in English. Providing additional time for these students may give them a better opportunity for composing and producing an answer confidently.

Most Frequently Used Strategies

Participants were asked to rate the above strategies in regard to how frequently they used them in instructing ELs. Four strategies that teachers used most frequently and how many teachers used them are shown in figure 2 below.

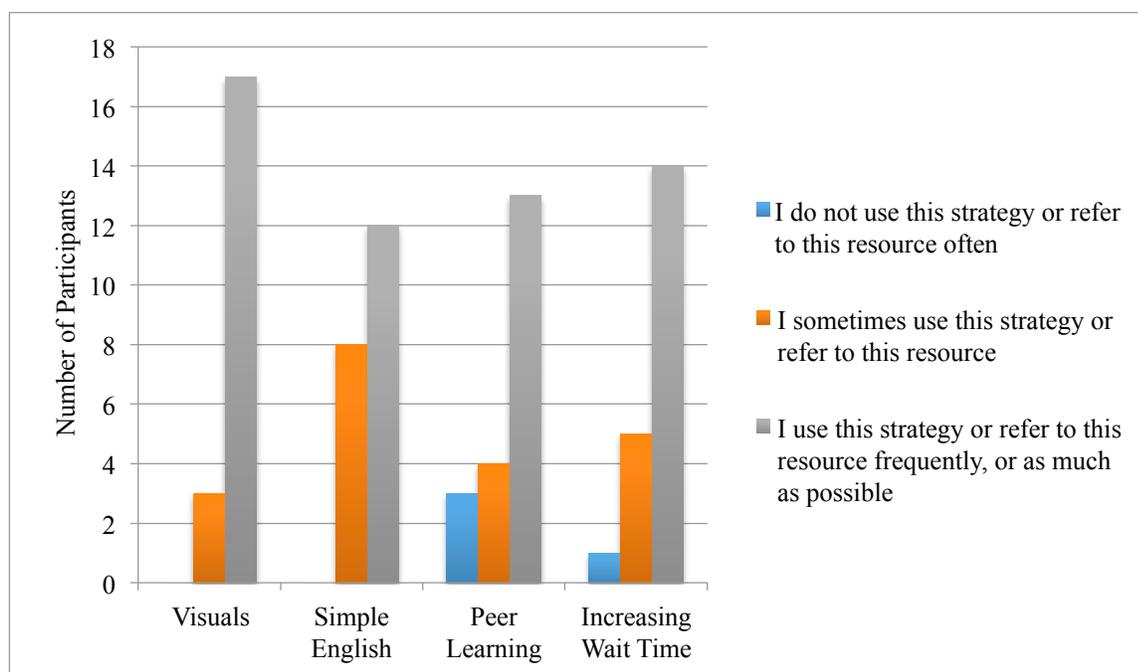


Figure 2: Most Frequently Used Teaching Strategies for ELs in Dance

In addition to rating the above strategies according to the frequency of their use, the participants were also asked to name the strategies they used most frequently to support English Learners' abilities to access the dance vocabulary in their classrooms. The data that resulted from this question was qualitatively analyzed for common trends, and the descriptive responses reinforced the data shown in figure 2. These common themes are detailed below.

Multimodal Approaches

Several teachers discussed using multi-modal approaches in their classrooms by using imagery, visuals, movement, and song together to help teach new concepts. A multi-modal method of teaching often refers to teaching one concept using many different points of access. One teacher referred to this strategy as "connection," in that the learning is approached by connecting one teaching approach to another, such as song to dance, and dance to language.

Another teacher wrote that whenever they are teaching any new concept, they try to teach it in multiple ways. They went on to say that they usually demonstrate the concept, explain it verbally, and write it down in some form. Yet another teacher referred to this strategy as “See-Say-Do.” They went on to describe this process in the following way: students see the words, say the words, and do an action related to the word. This multimodal approach involved three different ways for the students to experience a new vocabulary word: listening, speaking and through movement.

Gesture and acting out words was also cited as a frequent teaching strategy. Many teachers indicated that they used visuals in their dance instruction, which supported the data shown in figure 2. One participant wrote that they showed video content to provide yet another point of access for ELs. Another participant wrote that dance was effective for English Learners because students can follow along with the visual aspect of dance even if they do not speak English.

Leveraging Peer Learning

Five participants wrote that they paired their EL students with other students to support rigorous dance vocabulary. Some teachers chose to pair ELs with an EL buddy who spoke the same first language with a higher English proficiency. Then the buddy was asked to translate content and class instructions to their classmate. One teacher felt that they were lucky to often have other students who speak that language to help translate. One teacher wrote about strategically grouping students with varying language abilities to support less proficient English learners.

Repetition and Simplification

As indicated in figure 2, all of the participants indicated that they made efforts to simplify the language they used to instruct ELs at least some of the time, and twelve participants used this strategy as much as possible. In addition to this, teachers wrote about starting simply and building up content knowledge gradually. One teacher explained this approach as a “building block” method. Instead of giving students many new ideas or words at once, this teacher added a few new words, ideas and movements during each class, building on what had been learned prior to this.

Several teachers mentioned repetition as a strategy for ELs. This included repeating activities so that students had enough practice to remember the dance concepts being taught. Repetition was also mentioned in reference to having students repeat words out loud many times more than in a traditional dance class. One teacher wrote that they used “repeat after me” exercises in both physical and verbal modes. Another teacher combined verbal and physical repetition, instructing students to repeat words aloud while moving in a way that related to the words.

Least Frequently Used Strategies

Some strategies had a higher percentage of participant ratings in the “I do not use this strategy or refer to this resource often” category. However, that did not mean that these teaching methods were not used at all by the participants. The strategies presented in figure 3 below represented the least frequently used strategies.

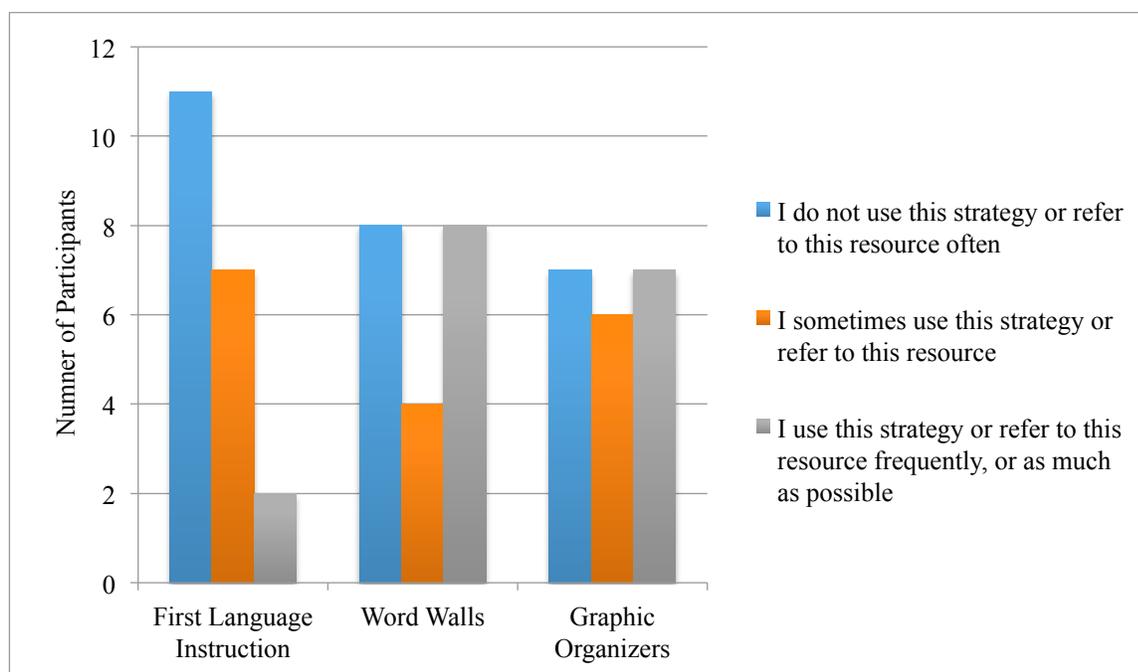


Figure 3: Least Frequently Used Teaching Strategies for ELs in Dance

Despite the outcomes displayed in figure 3 above, some teachers wrote about using first language instruction as a strategy in their descriptive answers. The form of first language instruction varied. One teacher introduced concepts in the students' home language, Spanish, and then worked towards replacing the Spanish word with the English or French term when teaching ballet. Two participants indicated that they used Google Translate to help present new content in students' home languages. Another teacher discussed that at their school, the English as a Second Language teacher welcomed students into her office and assisted the ELs with written assignments and quizzes by using Google Translate. Finally, one teacher wrote that they knew a little bit of their students' home language, which was Spanish, and spoke it as much as possible. This participant pointed out that this was especially important for a student's first time in their class.

Both words walls and graphic organizers were used by some participants, but also had some of the highest number of teachers who selected "I do not use this strategy or refer to this

resource often.” Although many participants mentioned writing words or concepts on a board, only one teacher mentioned that they had a permanent word wall in their classroom. In a similar trend, graphic organizers were only mentioned by one teacher in their descriptive answer.

Other Strategies

Another strategy that was discussed in more detail was the use of objectives in dance class. Participants were asked to elaborate on their use of this strategy. Most teachers wrote that they used content objectives in their lesson plans, which meant that they determined a learning goal related to dance, but not explicitly to the language used to communicate about dance. One teacher explained that the content objectives they typically wrote were performance based, and that was because they felt that students who struggled with language were often better able to articulate their understanding through movement. Another participant wrote that it was not their priority to set a language learning standard. A third participant explicitly noted that they did not incorporate language objectives, opting to have students demonstrate their knowledge by performing movement. A fourth teacher wrote that they do not include language objectives because their school did not require them, but expressed interest in the strategy. Similarly, a different participant noted that they had never considered it, and wanted to start.

Some teachers used objectives occasionally. One teacher wrote that while they do not typically include these objectives in their lesson plans, language skills are implicit results of learning in their dance classroom. This same teacher noted that some of their dance lessons are more specifically geared towards dance language and vocabulary, and these lessons include language objectives because of their nature. A different participant reported using a reflection goal that is sometimes expressed in movement, and other times expressed in oral or written language.

Several teachers consistently used both language and content objectives in their dance lessons. A participant said that they included both types of objectives in their lesson planning because they wanted their students to be able to both demonstrate dance skills and cognitively understand and describe what they are doing. Another participant thought that having both language and content objectives in a lesson allowed for their students to better understand the content fully.

One participant described the functions that language objectives had in their dance classroom. Their objectives included students being able to analyze dances in written form, notate dance choreography, and communicate the intent in choreography. This same teacher also required students to give feedback both orally and in written form.

Another teacher involved in the survey explained that they used language objectives because they typically try to include multiple opportunities for students to show their understanding of a skill or concept in different ways, which included describing skills orally or in writing. The distribution of the frequency of use of this strategy can be seen with numerical detail in figure 4 below. The two remaining strategies and their frequency of use are displayed in figure 4.

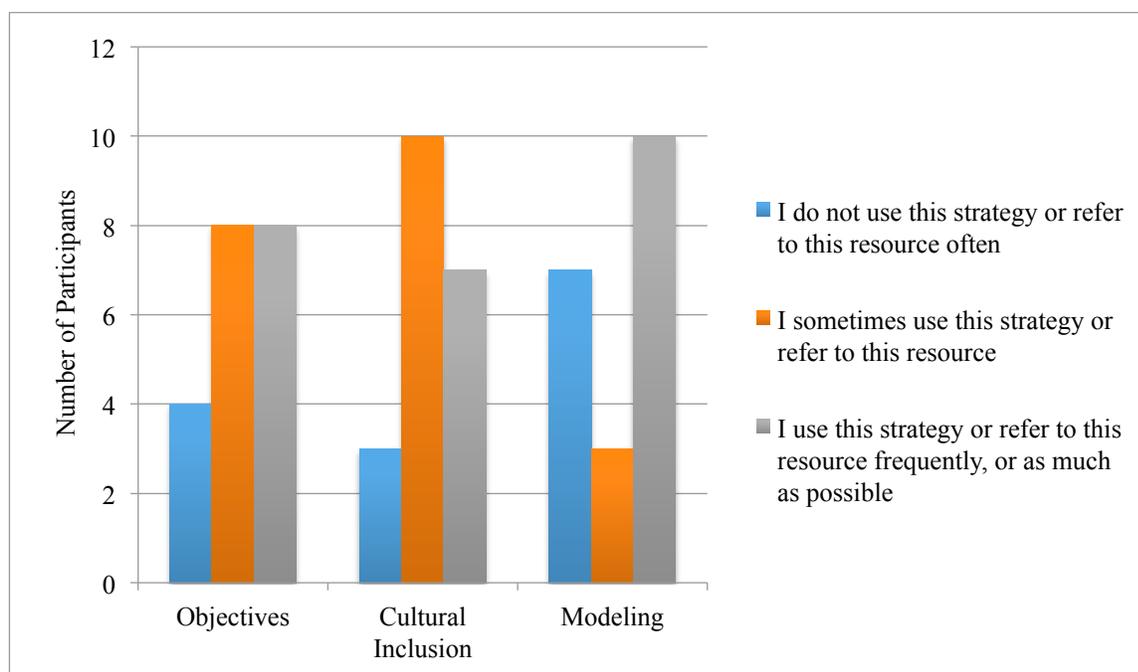


Figure 4: Other Teaching Strategies for ELs in Dance

Barriers to Effective Instruction

This research survey set out to investigate which aspects of teachers' situations or teaching practice stood in the way of rigorous, effective learning for ELs. There were three trends that emerged from the participants' descriptive answers: a variety of language levels in the EL students, lack of time and resources, and lack of relevant training. These trends are discussed in more detail below.

A Variety of Language Levels

As mentioned in chapter two, English Learners thrive in environments which promote both high support and high challenge. Participants in this research survey were asked to identify some of the greatest barriers to increasing rigor for English Learners in their dance classrooms. The first trend that stood out in participants' responses was that a variety of different language levels made supportive instruction challenging. One participant noted that because some students were at a lower English language level, they had to modify their instruction to make it easier for

these students to understand. As a result, students who are at a more advanced language level experienced simplified content.

This sentiment was echoed by another teacher, who indicated that their students came from different middle schools. Some students had exposure to English Language Development or English as a Second Language classes, some did not. This lack of consistency created a dance class with varying language levels which made it difficult for this teacher to increase rigor.

It was indicated by a few teachers that lower levels of English comprehension led to behavior problems, miscommunications with dance tasks, and lack of understanding of what was expected. One teacher wrote that there were unplanned interactions throughout the class when the students did not understand the instructions, and identified these moments as barriers to effective instruction. It is interesting to note that one of the participants felt that the mixed ability groups were an asset to their class. They wrote that sometimes ELs struggle with understanding written or spoken instructions, but when they plan for mixed language ability groups within the class, ELs performed at the level of their non-EL peers.

Time and Resources

Unsurprisingly, lack of time and resources was cited as a barrier to effective instruction. Teachers experienced different barriers specific to their teaching situations. Large class sizes restricted the number of activities one teacher could complete in their dance classes. Generally, when class sizes are large, more time must be spent establishing behavior expectations and managing student behavior. For some teachers involved in the study, large class sizes increased the ratio of students to adults in the classroom. Lack of any support from other teachers, aids, or adults in the dance classroom was identified as a barrier by one participant.

One participant wrote that some EL students had difficulty understanding classroom routines in the beginning of the year, and this resulted in more time being spent ensuring that these students understood the classroom systems. This prevented the teacher from getting into dance content as soon as possible.

Another participant noted that students were pulled from their class in order to complete testing requirements, which made it difficult to provide rigorous instruction for all. One teacher explained that they only saw students once a week, and that if they could at least see students twice a week, a lot more movement-related vocabulary acquisition would occur.

Lack of Training

The third trend in participants' responses was a lack of training. One participant expressed that they felt like they could not tell if they were pushing their EL students too hard. This teacher wondered if their students were feeling discouraged because they were being stretched too far out of their comfort zone, or because the teacher's expectations were unrealistic. A different participant wished that they had more knowledge of how to teach English Learners.

When teachers feel that they need development in a certain area, the responsibility often falls on the school administration, teacher mentors/coaches, or the school district to provide training or guidance. However, one teacher noted that school system guidelines and local administration did not always support some aspects of dance class, such as student choice and improvisation. They went on to say that in their experience, few administrators understood dance education and the positive ways that dance can impact student learning. This may be why another dance teacher communicated that she felt a lack of "wrap-around" support for her teaching practice and classroom.

English Learner-Specific Training Received by Participants

In the survey, participants were asked if they had ever received training in supporting the needs of English Learners, from their employer, school district, or other organization. They were then prompted to briefly describe the training. Ten of the participants indicated that they had not received any such training.

The rest of the responses varied greatly. One participant identified that they mostly taught themselves how to support ELs in their dance classes. Another participant said that they had received training, but it had been very minimal; they had only been able to attend about one to three sessions in their teaching career of more than six years. This training had been primarily targeted for the regular content classroom. This emphasis emerged as a trend in the participants' responses concerning their EL training. Another participant noted that even though they had about three to four professional development sessions on the topic, they were geared towards math and reading. None of the teachers acknowledged receiving any guidance for how to support English Learners in acquiring dance-related language or teaching them in the dance classroom.

Some of the teachers had received certifications related to teaching English. Two participants had taken intensive training in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Another received an EL endorsement as a part of higher education coursework, but their district did not provide any specific professional development in this topic.

One teacher experienced training in their undergraduate teacher preparation program. This teacher had taken a semester-long class specifically addressing the needs of English Learners, and EL topics were consistently addressed in other pedagogy classes. However, when this teacher graduated and began teaching professionally in a public secondary school, they

received only sporadic one to two hour long professional development sessions on the topic of instructing ELs.

Two of the teachers noted receiving consistent training on the topic from their school district and the schools at which they were employed. One of these teachers elaborated that the training was directed towards teaching in general, and the development was not specific to teaching dance.

The teachers who indicated that they had received training were asked to rate the relevancy of this training to supporting ELs in the dance classroom. They were asked to rate how relevant they thought the professional development they received was to their dance classroom on a scale from one to ten, with one listed as “not very relevant” and ten as “very relevant.”

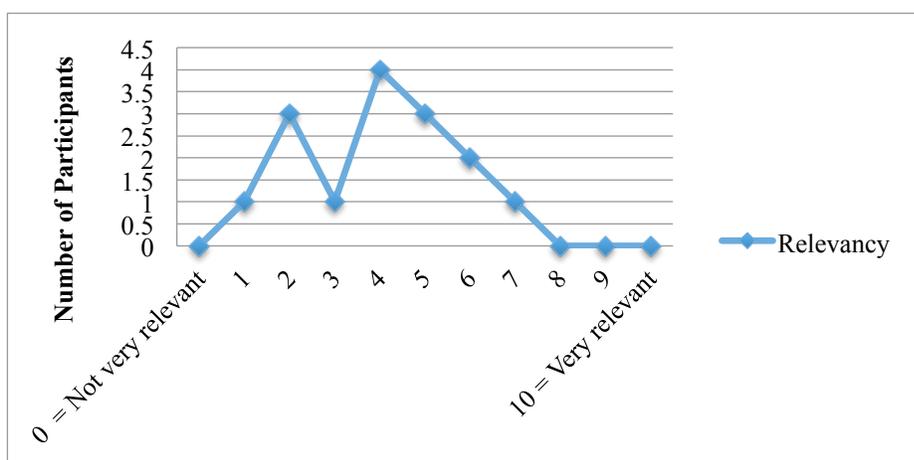


Figure 5: Participants’ Beliefs on the Relevancy of EL-Specific Training to the Dance Classroom on a Scale from 1-10

Figure 5 illustrates the number of participants who answered this question, and how relevant they thought the training they had received was, on a scale from one to ten. None of the participants felt that the training was very relevant to their classroom. The average answer was four out of ten. The highest answer was a seven out of ten, and the lowest answer was a one out of ten.

One teacher summed up their feelings about EL-specific training: "...I am disappointed that there is not a strong system in place to support ELs. If there is a better way to train teachers to specialize in this type of student, I would be happy to incorporate methods to help them get a great educational experience."

Opportunities for Rigor and Student Engagement

As mentioned in chapter two of this thesis, effective instruction is thought to take place by providing activities which are difficult enough for students to be challenged intellectually and personally, yet easy enough for them to complete with support from the teacher. This is especially important for English Learners, because it can lead to higher student engagement.

The participants were asked to define how they provided opportunities for rigor for ELs in their dance classes. Participants also answered a question regarding the benefits that dance had for the English Learners. They also indicated whether they thought that helping English Learners access language was part of their role as a dance teacher. It was from these answers the researcher gleaned information to address the third essential question about student engagement. These topics are discussed in more detail below.

Rigorous Dance Learning

The participants gave varying answers to the question about opportunities for increasing rigor in dance for their ELs. From the answers, it became clear that the concept of rigor was not universally agreed upon by the participants. Some participants discussed that the ELs in their dance classes experienced a similar amount of rigor to their non-EL peers because all students were working to master movement objectives. Due to the fact that students were able to demonstrate their learning through embodied movement, some teachers felt that there was little difference in skill level between ELs and their non-EL peers. One teacher noted that they were

not sure if they provided any different opportunities for English Learners than the ones supplied for their non-EL peers. Another teacher wrote that because movement is easy to follow and is a language all of its own, all of the students are learning the new terminology and movement skills together, essentially making the rigor equal between ELs and non-ELs.

Two participants admitted that they typically did not focus on increasing rigor in their dance classrooms, while another explained that they increased rigor by only speaking in English.

Some teachers identified several movement activities that they felt increased the rigor for their English Learners. One participant explained that they presented creative lessons using various themes such as animals, letters, and body parts to consistently challenge dancers while also giving them vocabulary support to succeed in other content areas. A different participant explained that they constantly encouraged and insisted upon their students demonstrating the most advanced skills, or providing answers, and explanations which matched their skill level.

Providing individual weekly assessments helped one of the participants identify how much the students had learned in order to increase rigor, while yet another dance teacher mentioned that they required their students to perform higher level language tasks to support dance learning. These opportunities included having students describe—orally and in writing—advanced artistic analyses of dances using dance-specific vocabulary. They also supported students in giving feedback to their peers while utilizing genre-based vocabulary.

Giving opportunities for peer collaboration and dance composition was also mentioned by several participants who answered this question. One teacher wrote that by allowing their students to work together on collaborative choreography projects, the students were able to pull from each others' strengths. In a similar vein, a different teacher elaborated that they offer increased opportunities for leadership in choreography for their students. A third participant

moved their students towards creating their own dance compositions very early on in their scope and sequence of instruction. A fourth participant mentioned that the collaborative creative assignments they assigned challenged their students.

Student Engagement

Though there was not a survey question that referred to student engagement precisely, the researcher looked for evidence of student engagement within the teachers' responses to other questions. One major theme that emerged was the idea of student success related to the universality of movement across languages. When students are feeling successful, they are mastering content. When they are mastering content, it implies that they are interested and engaged in said content. Simply stated, when students are interested and engaged, they are more likely to be successful in mastering content.

Many participants noted that because their EL students were able to be successful primarily through mimicking or following movement, they were therefore able to show their knowledge through embodied movement. This did not require them to speak, read, listen, or write to demonstrate what they knew. One participant explained that this process empowered the students and built their confidence. The dance classroom was defined as a safe place for English Learners by another teacher. Similarly, a third teacher said that their dance classroom was a place where ELs felt comfortable to express themselves. One teacher explained that when their students felt successful, they were readily developing new language skills as they connected language learning to movement vocabulary.

A different participant described the way that students felt valued and respected after this teacher made significant efforts to honor the students' cultural backgrounds in their curriculum.

This participant went on to say that in their experience, the more students felt respected and culturally included, the more they learned.

Benefits of Dance for English Learners

Every single one of the teachers involved in the survey felt that assisting English Learners in accessing dance language was part of their role as a dance teacher. One teacher explained that because language and dance are connected, learning English through body movement in an environment outside of the school classroom is very useful for ELs. One teacher felt that giving their EL students exposure to the shared visual language of dance was a very important part of the role they played. Another participant noted that the use of movement, expression and gesture could be quite powerful for their EL students. The universality of dance, which can communicate ideas across language barriers, was brought up several times by teachers who participated in the survey. The fact that dance was relatable to all students helped open doors for language understanding in one participants' teaching practice.

A different participant shared an anecdote about the benefits dance had for their EL students, "The reading and language specialists at my school often comment that EL students both read and verbally use complex words like 'slither,' 'explode,' and 'meander,' because they've experienced them physically in dance class."

One teacher reported that the nature of dance instruction made it easier for EL students to feel successful, and that created a huge boost in confidence, as well as improving motivation to stay engaged. This thought was paralleled by another participant who expressed that they thought dance may be the one part of the day where their EL students were learning like everyone else without being confused or feeling left behind.

Summary of the Discussion

In this chapter the researcher discussed the data that were generated by the research survey. The participants were dance teachers who taught English Learners in a variety of instructional dance environments. The data were collected in order to develop greater understanding of the experiences related to instructing ELs in the dance classroom. Most of the data were descriptive in nature and analyzed qualitatively. The researcher looked for commonalities within the participants' written answers and detailed the themes that emerged. Some data collected were quantitative and displayed in figures presented within this chapter. This researcher observed the data through the lens of the three essential questions, which were presented in chapter one of this thesis.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The researcher set out to glean knowledge from dance teachers who had experience instructing ELs in the dance classroom. The participants shared which teaching techniques they used most often, as well as the barriers to helping ELs access dance-specific language and vocabulary. Opportunities for providing rigorous dance instruction and the effect this instructional process had on students were also investigated by the researcher. At the time of this thesis, no previous published efforts to compile effective teaching techniques for ELs in dance based on responses from a variety of dance instructors had been found by the researcher.

Research Methodology

The researcher created the following three essential questions to guide her research:

- Q1 What specific strategies are currently being utilized by dance teachers to support ELs in accessing dance-specific language?
- Q2 What are the opportunities for and barriers to incorporating these strategies?
- Q3 Does this teaching process have any effect on student engagement in dance class?

The data found within this study was generated from a research survey which was distributed digitally through Qualtrics. The participants were dance teachers from a variety of teaching environments and experience levels. There was initially an effort to interview high school English Learners who had taken dance class at their schools, but this data could not be generated due to complications arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, the researcher looked for evidence to measure student engagement within the answers supplied by the teacher participants. Most of the data was analyzed qualitatively due to the descriptive answers written

by the participants who completed the survey. Some quantitative data was also produced from answers to questions that were more restrictive in nature.

Interpretation of the Findings

The interpretation of the data produced in this study was organized by the researcher based on the essential questions. The summary of these interpretations is found in the following paragraphs.

Essential Question One

The researcher wished to determine which teaching strategies were used most often for two reasons. First, it was assumed that experienced educators would use highly effective strategies most frequently. Secondly, the researcher estimated that these strategies would also be relatively feasible to use and not overly complicated.

The researcher asked the participants to first share the strategies they used most frequently using descriptive language, and then later in the study provided a bank of different strategies thought to be effective for ELs in the general content classroom. The dance teachers were then able to rate these strategies according to their frequency of use.

In their written responses, the teachers reported that multi-modal approaches were used often in their classes. This strategy manifested in a variety of ways, but often was expressed as a combination of movement or pantomime, oral language, song, showing visuals, and acting which all represented the same concept or word. This may be effective for ELs because they are able to link the language or vocabulary word with the concept it represents through embodied movement and in a variety of other ways.

When the dance teachers rated the teaching strategies, the use of visuals such as videos, real objects, and images was selected as the most frequent strategy used by teachers in the study

from the list of techniques supplied by the researcher. Simply adding an image next to a vocabulary word improved ELs ability to understand the attached concept, in these teachers' experiences. This may be due to language transfer, which is the idea that words are more easily learned by ELs if they already understand the concept in their native language.

Essential Question Two

The second essential question regarded the barriers to and opportunities for incorporating these strategies in dance class. The researcher wanted to know how offering rigorous dance experiences for ELs were implemented, including what stood in the way of such experiences, and where there were opportunities for quality instruction. These responses were quite varied, and it seemed that there were a group of dance educators that focused on developing students' movement proficiency and nurturing creative choreographers. These instructors indicated they offered less writing, discussion and analysis of dance in their classes. Other dance educators felt that the level of rigor was the same between EL and non-EL students due to the universal language of dance, and one teacher thought that by speaking English only, they were creating a rigorous environment. This conclusion could be due to the fact that much content knowledge in dance is developed through performing and creating. Consequently, an emphasis on the movement-based aspects of dance curricula do not involve the production of much oral or written language.

It should be noted that over-emphasizing the aspects of dance class which include performing and creating could reduce opportunities for responding to artistic work and connecting dance to other parts of life. Activities related to connecting and responding, which are two major sections of the national dance standards, may include comparing and contrasting dances, providing written or oral feedback for peers, writing dance reviews, or providing written

artistic statements. These academic processes could provide very vital opportunities to increase rigor for English Learners' acquisition of the English Language and dance vocabulary, but there were few instructors involved in the study that reported incorporating these elements of dance instruction in their classes. If any of these instructors' students choose to continue their dance studies in higher education or professionally, they may then be lacking the skills they need to write or speak about dance.

A major barrier to effective instruction described by the dance teachers revolved around the lack of training and resources for teaching ELs in dance class. The training that had been available to the teachers in this study over the course of their careers varied. None of the teachers indicated receiving training for instructing ELs that was specific to dance class. The teachers who had received training were asked to rate how relevant they felt the training they had received was to their dance classroom on a scale from one to ten. The average response was a four out of ten. This outcome indicated a general trend that there is insufficient training for dance teachers which includes strategies that specifically benefit English Learners. This could be a reason why many of the teachers involved in this study emphasized the performing and creating aspects of dance class over connecting and responding related content. One participant expressed disappointment in this lack of training, and acknowledged the potential for learning that dance had for their students. Another participant had never considered particular strategies for teaching dance before, further emphasizing the need for dance resources related to instructing English Learners.

Essential Question Three

The third essential question in this research study pertained to student engagement. Many of the participants wrote about the myriad benefits for ELs in dance class. The fact that a lot of

dance content knowledge can be built through embodying creative movement or following the teacher's movements can create environments in which ELs felt successful and safe. It was noted by one participating teacher that dance was the one part of the day when their EL students did not feel held back by their language proficiency level. In the participants' dance classes, EL students were able to express themselves and feel respected, all while having fun with their peers.

This type of learning environment can be productive and beneficial for ELs, especially those who feel frustrated by the rest of their school day. Dance is innately accessible across languages, and is present in most cultural traditions. In analyzing this data, the researcher felt that dance instruction generally offers a uniquely engaging experience for ELs that could potentially be leveraged into rigorous instruction. Dance could even be used to reinforce or build content knowledge vocabulary from other subjects such as English Language Arts, math, science, and social studies.

Limitations of the Study

One of the biggest limitations of this research was that even though the researcher investigated English Learners in the dance classroom, the outcome of this research did not contain their voices. Thus, it was difficult to gauge levels of student engagement through teacher input alone.

Other limitations included the fact that there was a relatively small sample group for this study, and the research instruments were created by the researcher. These research instruments were not tested for reliability or validity, and have never been used by other researchers. Second, although the questions contained in the research instruments were written to the researcher's best ability to be devoid of bias, bias may still have been present in the questions.

Additionally, there was no specific indication that what works well with one group of English Learners may work well with other groups. The teachers in this study may have taught students from different ethnic groups or cultures, and it may not have been possible to use certain strategies in some dance classes. This study only provided information on what had worked in these specific teachers' experiences when teaching ELs in dance without any reference to the ethnic group being taught.

Comparison to Other Research

Perhaps the study which was most similar to this research was Jamie Johnson's investigation of Chinese ELs' experiences in a college dance course⁷. This study was discussed in detail in chapter two of this thesis. In a review of this study, Johnson indicated that the ELs enrolled in college courses found the teacher's use of visuals—specifically vocabulary words written on the board and anatomy charts translated in English and Chinese—to be very beneficial. The data supplied by the current research study showed that the participating instructors used this strategy frequently, which suggested that the use of visuals was both feasible and effective in their classrooms.

Johnson also implemented strategic peer group strategies in her classes, which resulted in more opportunities for the ELs in her dance course to practice their oral language when discussing dance. While Johnson suggested purposefully grouping ELs with non-EL peers, some participants involved in the current study referenced using student translators to help ELs understand the class content. It was not clear which peer-learning strategy was more effective, but it should be noted that peer learning is a frequently used strategy with EL learners.

In Johnson's study, several of the college students explained that they enrolled in the dance courses because they thought it would not involve very much reading, writing or speaking.

However, once they began taking the classes, they discovered that the linguistic rigor was much higher than they expected. This response served to further emphasize the point that teachers of ELs in dance should consider incorporating rigorous language activities within their dance classrooms, especially considering that the outcome of the current study suggested that ELs felt safe, respected, and successful in dance.

Recommendations for Further Research

There is a general lack of research on the topic of teaching EL students in dance, and many potential research questions arose throughout the course of this study.

Johnson's study involved interviewing college students, but at the time of this study, elementary and secondary students had not been interviewed in relation to their experiences as ELs in a dance classroom. Considering that there are elementary and even more secondary dance programs that serve EL populations, more research should be conducted on these student's personal experiences.

Peer learning was discussed in this thesis, but there were several different grouping strategies identified. For example, is grouping lower English proficiency students with other ELs that have higher English proficiency more effective than grouping ELs with non ELs in dance class? There are many studies which examine cooperation in dance, but it may be beneficial to see if students' language abilities improve through peer collaboration.

This study certainly suggested that more resources and more relevant training protocols for dance teachers who instruct ELs is needed. Further research and study which would result in the development of resources or a curriculum that addresses this training gap would greatly benefit ELs in dance classrooms.

Finally, the researcher recommends looking into the advantages of implementing a dance curriculum which emphasizes creating, performing, connecting and responding equally, and what effect this type of curriculum may have for ELs acquisition of rigorous dance language.

Summary

This research provided a starting point to understand which strategies dance teachers used frequently to instruct ELs in their dance classrooms. It also revealed a lack of relevant training for teaching ELs in dance, which was a major barrier for the participants involved in this study. Even though almost all the teachers felt that assisting ELs in accessing the English language was a part of their role as a dance teacher, there were a variety of different levels of linguistic rigor implemented by the teachers. Finally, this research study revealed that many of the participants believed that their EL students felt successful, respected, and safe in dance class.

WORKS CITED

- Alba, Monica. "Celebrating Women: Prima Ballerina Evelyn Cisneros." *NBC Latino*, 3 Apr. 2012, nbclatino.com/2012/03/07/18915316797/.
- Bonbright, Jane, et al. *Evidence: A Report on the Impact of Dance in the K-12 Setting*. National Dance Education Organization, 2013, *Evidence: A Report on the Impact of Dance in the K-12 Setting*, https://www.ndeo.org/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=893257&module_id=153248.
- Brayboy, Bryan McKinley Jones, and Angelina E. Castagno. "Self-Determination through Self-Education: Culturally Responsive Schooling for Indigenous Students in the USA." *Teaching Education*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2009, pp. 31–53., doi:10.1080/10476210802681709.
- Callahan, Rebecca M. *The English Learner Dropout Dilemma: Multiple Risks and Multiple Resources*. 2013, www.cdrp.ucsb.edu.
- Caterall, James S., et al. *The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies*. National Endowment for the Arts, 2012, *The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies*, www.arts.gov/publications/arts-and-achievement-risk-youth-findings-four-longitudinal-studies.
- Christenson, Sandra L., et al., editors. *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*. Springer-Verlag New York Inc, 2012.
- "Developing English Language Skills through Dance" *Vimeo*, uploaded by ArtsConnection, 27 October 2014, <https://vimeo.com/110194978>.

Elpus, Kenneth. *Understanding the Availability of Arts Education in U.S. High Schools*. National Endowment for the Arts, 2017. <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Research-Art-Works-Maryland6.pdf>

“English Language Learners in Public Schools.” *The Condition of Education - English Language Learners in Public Schools: Indicator May (2019)*, National Center for Education Statistics, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgf.asp#info.

“Fact Sheet: Ensuring English Learner Students Can Participate Meaningfully and Equally in Educational Programs.” *U.S. Department of Education*, Office for Civil Rights, 25 Sept. 2018, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ellresources.html>.

Gibbons, Pauline. *English Learners, Academic Literacy, and Thinking: Learning in the Challenge Zone*. Heinemann, 2009.

Hansen-Thomas, Holly. “Sheltered Instruction: Best Practices for ELLs in the Mainstream.” *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2008, pp. 165–169., doi:10.1080/00228958.2008.10516517.

Hardiman, Mariale M., et al. “The Effects of Arts-Integrated Instruction on Memory for Science Content.” *Trends in Neuroscience and Education*, vol. 14, 2019, pp. 25–32., doi:10.1016/j.tine.2019.02.002.

Horowitz, Rob. “English Language Acquisition through Dance and Theater: Impact and Pathways.” *American Educational Research Association National Conference, New York City, April 13-17, 2018*, Arts Research, 2018.

Janzen, Joy. “Teaching English Language Learners in the Content Areas.” *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 78, no. 4, 2008, pp. 1010–1038., doi:10.3102/0034654308325580.

- Johnson, Jamie A. “Culturally Inclusive Dance: Working with Chinese English Language Learners in the Dance Technique Classroom.” *Journal of Dance Education*, vol. 18, no. 1, Feb. 2018, pp. 3–12., doi:10.1080/15290824.2017.1317781.
- Leonard, A.E. *Moving the School and Dancing Education: Case Study Research of K-5 Students' Experiences in a Dance Residency*. MS Thesis or PhD Dissertation, U of Wisconsin-Madison, 2012.
- Li, Guofang, and Patricia A. Edwards. *Best Practices in ELL Instruction*. Guilford Press, 2010, ProQuest, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unco/reader.action?docID=515886&ppg=162.
- McMahon, Susan D., et al. “Basic Reading Through Dance Program.” *Evaluation Review*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2003, pp. 104–125., doi:10.1177/0193841x02239021.
- Marino, Katrin. *The Benefits of Art Education for English Language Learners' Acquisition of the English Language*. PhD Dissertation, St. John's U, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2018. <https://unco.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.unco.idm.oclc.org/docview/1978496358?accountid=12832>.
- Mariani, Luigi. *Perspectives: a Journal of TESOL-Italy*, XXIII, no. 2, 1997, pp. 5–19.
- Marshall, Julia. “Transforming Education through Art-Centered Integrated Learning.” *Visual Inquiry*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2014, pp. 361–376., doi:10.1386/vi.3.3.361_1.
- National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education, 2014. www.nationalcoreartsstandards.org.
- National Education Association. *Understanding the Gaps: Who Are We Leaving Behind – And How Far?* NEO Education Policy and Practice & Priority Schools Department, 2015, www.nea.org/assets/docs/18021-Closing_Achve_Gap_backgrndr_7-FINAL.pdf.

New York State Department of Education. *Professional Development for Developing English Language Literacy Through the Arts*. ArtsConnection, 2016.

<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/artsedprofdev/2012/nycapp.pdf>

Peppler, Kylie A., et al. "Positive Impact of Arts Integration on Student Academic Achievement in English Language Arts." *The Educational Forum*, vol. 78, no. 4, 2014, pp. 364–377., doi:10.1080/00131725.2014.941124.

Ruppert, Sandra S. *Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement*. MetLife Foundation, 2006, *Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement*, eric.ed.gov/?id=ED529766.

Sanchez, Claudio. "English Language Learners: How Your State Is Doing." NPR, NPR, 23 Feb. 2017, www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/02/23/512451228/5-million-english-language-learners-a-vast-pool-of-talent-at-risk.

Shapiro, Shawna. "Words that You Said Got Bigger": English Language Learners' Lived Experiences of Deficit Discourse." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2014, pp. 386-406. *ProQuest*, <https://unco.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.unco.idm.oclc.org/docview/1523923414?accountid=12832>.

"Using Charts and Visual Aids in Dance Class." *Vimeo*, uploaded by ArtsConnection, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/110193908>.

Wass, Rob, and Clinton Golding. "Sharpening a Tool for Teaching: the Zone of Proximal Development." *Teaching in Higher Education*, vol. 19, no. 6, 2014, pp. 671–684., doi:10.1080/13562517.2014.901958.

WIDA *English Language Development Standards*. WIDA, <https://wida.wisc.edu/teach/standards/eld>.

WIDA *Mission and History*. WIDA, <https://wida.wisc.edu/about/mission-history>.

Winsler, Adam, et al. "Selection into, and Academic Benefits from, Arts-Related Courses in Middle School among Low-Income, Ethnically Diverse Youth." *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 2019, doi:10.1037/aca0000222.

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) DOCUMENTS



Institutional Review Board

DATE: January 29, 2020

TO: Breegan Kearney

FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1510927-2] English Language Learners in the Dance Classroom: Building Bridges to Rigorous Language Acquisition

SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: January 29, 2020

EXPIRATION DATE: January 29, 2024

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

Hi Breegan,

Your project has been approved, however, there are a couple of items for you to address prior to starting your data collection:

1. Your narrative indicates you will obtain consent from the teacher participants via a no-signature consent due to the survey being administered online. However, the consent form included had signature lines. I have revised the wording of the voluntary participation paragraph for you to the no-signature wording, removed the signature lines, and put my information back in for the participant contact regarding treatment. You must use this revised consent form with your participants. If you need to make changes from its appearance now, or you want to go with signatures, you would need to submit a modification request.

2. As previously mentioned and acknowledged by you, just a reminder to submit your permission letters prior to starting data collection. You can email them to me at nicole.morse@unco.edu. Once sent, there is no need for you to wait for confirmation of receipt before proceeding.

Thank you and best of luck with your research!

Nicole Morse

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Morse at 970-351-1910 or nicole.morse@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHER PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: English Language Learners in the Dance Classroom: Building Bridges to Rigorous Language Acquisition

Researcher: Breegan Kearney, M.A. Candidate at University of Northern Colorado, School of Theatre Arts & Dance, Extended Studies Division

Researcher E-mail: kear5523@bears.unco.edu, breegankearney@gmail.com

Advisor: Sandra Minton, Ph.D., Co-Coordinator, Dance Education MA.

Advisor Contact: Sandra Minton, School of Theatre Arts & Dance, Fraiser Hall 105, Campus Box 49, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639. Email: Sandra.minton@unco.edu

Purpose and Description: The overall purpose of this research study is to examine three aspects of the process used to teach English language learners (ELLs) in dance classrooms. These aspects of the teaching process include: strategies being utilized by teachers to support ELLs in accessing dance-specific language, the opportunities for and barriers to incorporating these strategies, and any relationships this process has to ELL student engagement in dance.

The time required for this survey is about **15-20 minutes**. During this survey, you will answer questions about specific strategies or techniques you use to support ELLs in accessing the dance content you teach in as rigorous a way as possible. You will also be asked to briefly describe the amount of training you have received in providing this kind of instruction. Additionally, you will be given a list of common ELL sheltering strategies and be asked to rate the frequency of their use in your dance classroom.

This survey will not be used to evaluate your teaching performance in any way, and the information you contribute will be kept confidential. You will only be identified by a random letter, and the name of your school will not be used anywhere in presentations or written documents based on the study. In addition, responses made by your ELL dance students in their interviews will not be used to affect or evaluate your teaching performance in any way. Data collected and analyzed for this study will be kept on a password protected computer and the consent forms will be hand delivered to the office of Christy O'Connell-Black, Dance Education MA co-coordinator, Crabbe Hall, room 308.

I foresee minimal potential risks or discomforts for this research, aside from the normal anxiety some individuals may feel in completing a survey. There are several benefits to this study, such as contribution of knowledge to the dance field in an area which is not widely researched. The data generated from this study has the potential to benefit teachers, schools, school districts, and English language learners alike, as well as elevate the perception of dance in education.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Please take your time to read and thoroughly review this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study. If you decide to participate, your completion of the research procedures indicates your consent. Please keep or print this form for your records. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Office of Research & Sponsored Programs, Carter Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Instrument 1

Teacher Participant Online Survey Questions

1. Select the environment in which you have instructed English language learners in dance content (Select all that apply)
 - a.) Public elementary (K-5)
 - b.) Public secondary (6-12)
 - c.) Charter elementary (K-5)
 - d.) Charter secondary (6-12)
 - e.) Private elementary (K-5)
 - f.) Private secondary (6-12)
 - g.) Private studio
 - h.) As part of an arts-outreach organization
 - i.) Other environment
2. How many years of experience do you have instructing English language learners in dance content?
 - a.) less than one year
 - b.) 1-3 years
 - c.) 4-6 years
 - d.) more than 6 years
3. Have you received training or professional development, either by your employer, the school district, or other institution in relation to supporting the needs of English language learners? If so, please briefly describe the length of the training.
4. On a scale from 1-10, with 0 being not very relevant and 10 being very relevant, how relevant was this training to supporting ELLs in the dance classroom?
5. If you write lesson plans, do you include both content and language objectives in your dance lesson plans? (An example of a content objective for first grade students is, "Students will be able to leap from one foot to another over an object on the floor." A language objective is, "Students will be able to describe a leap," or "Students will be able to correctly identify a leap with spoken language.") Please write a brief 1-2 sentence description of why or why not.

6. Which techniques do you use most frequently in supporting English language learners' ability to understand the vocabulary and activities in your dance class? List up to 3 techniques.
7. What opportunities do you provide for increasing rigor for your English language learners' dance experiences?
8. What are the barriers to increasing rigor for your English language learners' experiences in dance class?
9. Do you feel that assisting English language learners in accessing language is part of your role as a dance teacher? Why or why not?
10. What benefits, if any, do you believe dance has to offer to students who are English language learners?

Please rate the frequency at which you use of the following teaching strategies on a scale of 1-3.

1: I do not use this strategy or refer to this resource often.

2: I sometimes use this strategy or refer to this resource.

3: I use this strategy or refer to this resource frequently, or as much as possible.

Strategy	Brief Description	Rating
Increasing wait time	Giving ELLs more time to answer questions	
Simple English	Implementing a conscious effort to simplify the language you use to instruct by removing idioms, slang, cultural references, or advanced vocabulary.	
Sentence starters	Either oral or written, sentence starters help students begin a thought. (ex: My favorite dance style is.....)	
Peer learning	Pairing ELLs with native speakers during group work	
Visuals	Accompanying your content or meaning with pictures, gestures, or real objects	
First Language Instruction	Explaining concepts, ideas, or vocabulary in ELL's first language or in a language other than English.	
Word Wall	A physical display that contains target vocabulary words related to the content being taught.	
Graphic Organizers	Visual aids that students can use to help them understand relationships between content knowledge. These could include Venn diagrams or guided note templates for students to use when watching videos.	
Cultural Inclusion	Integrating content that is related to the culture of ELLs' first language, or giving ELLs a chance to share that culture with the	

	class.	
Objectives	Communicating both language and content objectives to students.	
Modeling (writing)	Modeling the genre of writing to be accomplished in dance class. If the class is writing personal reflections in a journal, this includes modeling how someone may write a personal reflection by co-constructing a sample journal entry with the class.	