



Dance for Lifelong Wellbeing

Research Findings 2017 – Overview



Dance for Lifelong Wellbeing Project: Phase 2

This project develops the research findings from the 2013 Dance for Lifelong Wellbeing project undertaken by the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD), contributing to and enhancing research in relation to dance for older adults. The 2013 project focused on qualitative evaluation of the experiences of both teachers and participants with extremely positive findings and enthusiasm for the work to continue.

One teacher commented, 'By the final class, I could sense that each group had gained a level of agency and self-direction via performance' and another that, 'There was a noticeable increase in energy and enthusiasm of the participants'. The 2013 report also identified that many of the learners never imagined that they would be able to join a dance class, and that participation reduced inhibitions and built self-confidence. These findings were developed into classes offered by the RAD, and teacher training delivered as part of its Continuing Professional Development provision.

In order to build on the rich qualitative data found in 2013, the 2016 project focused on quantitative profiling and impact measurements for balance, quality of life, and daily physical activity levels (using wearable technology). With the support of The Garfield Weston Foundation, this project began with specialist teacher training, focusing on working with older learners, held at the RAD in February 2016. Following this, weekly dance classes were offered to older adults across six community and residential venues in London between February and May 2016.

Throughout the delivery of the classes, teachers were observed in their practice, and provided with both peer and mentor support.

Key findings

- **Psychosocial impact**

Questionnaire-based evaluations revealed demonstrable improvements in perceptions of quality of life following participation in the 12 week dance programme.

- **Physiological impact**

Balance was significantly improved in those with low mobility, resulting in the potential to reduce the risk of falling in this vulnerable subset of the older learner population.

Sessions also contributed to participants' meeting of recommended exercise participation levels.

- **Recommendations for future practice**

The evaluation of teacher training, peer and mentor observations and reflections, and research, informed understanding of the most valuable elements to include when working with this population. These will be used to inform future teacher training and development of supporting resources.

Project aims

This project aimed to measure the potential impact of a community-based dance intervention on overall daily activity levels, balance and quality of life in older adults. This three-strand approach was selected in order to quantitatively and qualitatively identify potential change in each of these areas. These represent measures contributing to overall health and wellbeing, along with the potential for reduced morbidity and mortality.

With typically decreased levels of activity seen in the older adult population and, in many cases, a lack of access to appropriate services, the provision of free dance sessions in convenient locations alone, will contribute to meeting these needs.

The researchers' key areas of interest are related to overall physiological and psychological health of participants for functional independence and reduction in falls risk by way of improved balance.

Teacher training

Six qualified dance teachers (f=5, m=1) undertook initial training to equip them with further skills, as informed by research, including the 2013 findings, to support their delivery of dance activities for older adults. In recommending dance as a viable, inexpensive, appealing and valuable activity for older adults, Keogh et al. draw researchers' attention to the need for structuring, differentiation and progression of session content to be carefully considered in order to "maximise gains in physical function while ensuring participant safety and enjoyment" (495).

These areas were addressed in the training offered to teachers prior to delivery of the programme by way of standardising the delivery of sessions and sharing of best practice on differentiation and modification of activity for participants with varied needs and capabilities. The teachers were then observed in their practice and provided with peer and mentor support throughout.

The aim of providing such training was to ensure all dance activity content was safe and appropriate as well as engaging, inclusive, and therefore as accessible as possible for all participants. Independently dwelling participants attended sessions in fully accessible community venues, and teachers delivered weekly sessions in residential settings as well. The training was delivered by Faculty of Education staff along with external experts in the field, including Diane Amans, Clare Guss-West and Charlotte Tomlinson.



Other observations

Throughout the project, teacher focus groups were held during which the six teachers and their mentor shared experiences and reflected upon teaching approaches and participant response. The discussions addressed effective strategies to facilitate progression for participants (who presented with wide ranging physical and cognitive abilities) and how feedback is best provided to support their engagement.

The data collected from all of the above will contribute to development of resources and training for teachers wishing to undertake further work in this field.

It is hoped that the specialist training to support teachers in developing their skills and confidence in working with older adults, as well as raising the profile of dance as a highly beneficial activity for older adults, will promote uptake and encourage others to get involved. The RAD will be continuing to develop the resources, teacher training, support and networking opportunities to ensure continuation of best practice identified in the 2013 and 2016 Dance for Lifelong Wellbeing research projects.

Additional outcomes

The project was successful beyond its initial remit to collect data to show the impact of a dance intervention. The following areas have had a beneficial impact upon the local community in Wandsworth, and more widely in London:

- Creation of a model for delivery of a 12 week dance scheme for older learners
- Identification of best practice for dance teachers in relation to older learners
- Training and mentoring of 6 dance teachers to work with older learners
- A contribution to the RAD's strategic objective of offering dance opportunities for older learners

References

Keogh, Justin W. et al. "Physical benefits of dancing for healthy older adults: a review." *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity*, vol. 17, 2009, pp479–500.

Watts, Victoria – editor. *Dance for Lifelong Wellbeing: Project Report*. London: Royal Academy of Dance. 2013. www.rad.org.uk/more/dance-for-lifelong-wellbeing/report. Accessed 8 Feb. 2017.



Research team

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Teachers and venues

Mentor

Sarah Platt

Teachers

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Venue partners

Esther Randall Court, One Housing
Roseberry Mansions, One Housing
Royal Academy of Dance
Second Half Centre
St Margaret's Activity Centre
White City Community Centre



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