The Experience of Let’s Keep Moving: Giving Voice to Dancers of the Third Age

Kluge, M.A., LeCompte, M., & Willis, B. (2009)
University of Colorado, Colorado Springs

To broaden the view of the experience of Let’s Keep Moving, different data sources were purposely selected for this study. Focus group. A 20-min focus group was held by a representative group of participants. Focus groups are used in exploratory phases of research to get participants’ attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, & reactions about a topic. Data from focus groups provides multiple perspectives as well as shared understandings (Vaughn, Shay, Schueller & Sinagoga, 1995).

Field notes. During 3 class sessions, 2 pedagogical experts who are not dancers or dance instructors, observed and took notes. Data triangulated from the focus group discussion, expert’s observation notes, and videotaped footage indicated that the instructor’s observation notes, and videotaped footage indicated that the participant’s perception of the experience was enhanced by dance. The results showed that the class was run in a way that encouraged the participants to dance.

Participants
The residents who participated in the Let’s Keep Moving class were all women, ranging in age from 77-92. Only one individual had any previous dance training. All of the participants attend a Balance and Mobility class and a group exercise class 1-3 times per week.

The Class
Let’s Keep Moving incorporated dance & movement routines to increase range of motion, balance, and coordination; improve posture & strength. People of all fitness levels were encouraged to attend. Music was used to “activate” various kinds of movement. Class met for 1 hour for four (4) consecutive weeks. The instructor has been a dance teacher, performer, and dance therapist for over 50 years. An “older woman” herself, who has Parkinson’s disease. This teacher understands the needs and challenges that older bodies have.

Data Collection
To gain a broad view of the experience of Let’s Keep Moving, different data sources were purposely selected for this study.

Focus group. A 20-min. focus group was held by a representative group of participants.

Field notes. During 3 class sessions, 2 pedagogical experts who are not dancers or dance instructors, observed and took notes.

Visual documentation. Videotaped footage of the Let’s Keep Moving class was collected during 3 sessions.

Data Analysis
Line-by-line analysis was conducted on focus group data by 2 data coders (1st & 2nd authors). To formulate meaning from these significant statements, “code words” (words used in conversation by participants) were highlighted, given equal weight, & clustered into themes (Creswell, 1998). Four themes emerged:

Two (2) structural themes related to how the class was run:
(1) Teacher feature (2) The class itself

Two (2) meanings themes related to what the class meant:
(1) Dancing at this age… (2) The benefits of dance

Findings
To corroborate different but complimentary data, a technique called “triangulation” was used (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Field notes confirmed the themes and focus group data & videotaped footage corroborated field notes. To ensure trustworthiness, ‘member checking’ was done (Creswell, 1998). Participants were asked if the data collected represented their thoughts and feelings accurately; they did.

Discussion
Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (1997) appeared to have potency for and was operational during this dance experience. Self-efficacy is an individual’s perception that he or she can do an activity successfully and has the capability to organize and execute desired outcomes. Findings indicate that the participants in the Let’s Keep Moving class clearly became more efficacious about moving and were motivated to “keep moving.” Bandura contends that there are four elements, or processes, that influence self-efficacy:
(1) Mastery; (2) Verbal Persuasion; (3) Vicarious experience (having role models); and, (4) Physiological and emotional states.

Vicarious experience. Data triangulated from the focus group discussion, expert’s observation notes, and videotaped footage indicated that the instructor was positive role model of what a “dancer of the third age” might look like and be able to do, even with a “serious disease.” What she wore “elicited a positive response.” Some of the women thought their “dancing days were over” or, “never expected at this age” that they would get a chance to dance. In the Let’s Keep Moving class, however, participants found “joy in the movement.”

Verbal persuasion. The instructor persuaded the residents that they “could do” dance. She “was very encouraging.” Feedback from the instructor to participants such as, “you are doing really well” and “there are some good dancers here” were common phrases.

Mastery. Participants perceived improvement (mastery) in their dancing about other things as well. They said they were “moving better now;” “opening up and talking more;” “walking better.” These statements by participants, observations by pedagogical experts, and videotaped footage corroborate that a sense of mastery was attained, even in “a short week.”

Physiological/emotional states. Dance class inspired participants to believe that their dancing days were not over & changed their “we can’t do it anymore” mindset to a “can-do” mindset. An emotional “high” was reported during and after class. The music “was an aid; “it really helped” to elevate positive feelings and body awareness.

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References

Limitations of the Study & Future Research
There is less control over the data produced in a focus group than in one-to-one interviews. Because participants share their thoughts in a group setting, full disclosure and/or the development of individual perspectives may be limited. Future research should include individual interviews with class members. The sample size for this pilot study was small. Future research should include more participants and data should be collected over a longer period of time. No physical measures were obtained to validate participants’ perceptions about the physical benefits of dance class. Future research should include measures for balance, flexibility, and stamina.