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## **Dancing on Zoom: Introducing the Principles of Creative Movement into Distance Learning in Primary School**

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### **Abstract**

This paper presents a pilot study of creative movement workshops that enriched the school life of fourth graders at a primary school in Slovenia during the closure of educational institutions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The project involved a dancer

who met with students via the Zoom platform for four months, preparing, leading, and facilitating dance activities based on current curriculum content. Using qualitative analysis, we present the views of students, parents, a teacher and a dancer on the integration of arts to online teaching and learning. The creative movement workshops exhibited the importance of including opportunities for movement within online curriculum for students, as they spent most of their time sitting in front of screens. The workshops created opportunities for social interaction where other forms of online instruction otherwise reduced social contact. Finally, the movement and dance activities contributed to a better understanding of some learning content.

### **Introduction**

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, the years 2020 and 2021 have shaken most established educational institutions to their foundations, school closures disabled social and physical contexts of schooling, which are among the most essential conditions to learning (Giguere, 2021). Even primary school education was forced to move online. In Slovenia, distance education took place between March and May 2020, between November 2020 and February 2021, and for a week in April 2021. To prevent the spread, all educational institutions from kindergarten to faculties were physically closed across the country as well as all sport facilities, meanwhile playing on playgrounds and other physical structures in parks was limited (Jurak et. al., 2021).

The study presented in this paper took place within the framework of the European Project Development of Communication Skills through Cultural and Artistic Education (SKUM, 2021), which was implemented in Slovenia between 2017 and 2022. The SKUM project was based on the ideas that art has a value in itself, that it has enormous educational potential, and that knowledge through artistic experience is as valuable as scientific discourse. The main goal of the project was to develop pedagogical approaches and new forms of combining educational work with artistic activities. In practice this meant cooperation between cultural institutions and individual artists with schools or individual classes of children and young people. The aim of the project was, therefore, to develop links between educational institutions, artists, and cultural institutions to expand innovative and open learning environments supported by new pedagogical approaches that strengthen the communication skills of children, students, or young people.

This paper presents the pilot study *Dancing on Zoom*, a series of creative movement workshops for fourth grade students, which was conducted during the closure of schools due to the pandemic in a fourth-grade class of a municipal primary school in Slovenia (figure 1). In order to achieve the aforementioned goals of the SKUM project, we, as researchers,

pedagogues, and dancer, decided to continue the planned activities during lockdowns. The visiting artist was a dancer whose approaches involved not only pedagogical but artistic processes. She brought creative movement and dance practices into the online classroom, while the regular teacher of the class was not familiar with these procedures. Note that in this article the term dancer is used for one of the authors of the paper in the role of visiting artist, dance educator, and a researcher. The main objective of the process was to create an alternative learning environment that aimed not only to reinforce an understanding of the curricular content through the integration of creative movement, but also to provide social interaction with classmates, active and diverse dance-movement experiences, and a break from the lonely, sedentary days during the closure.

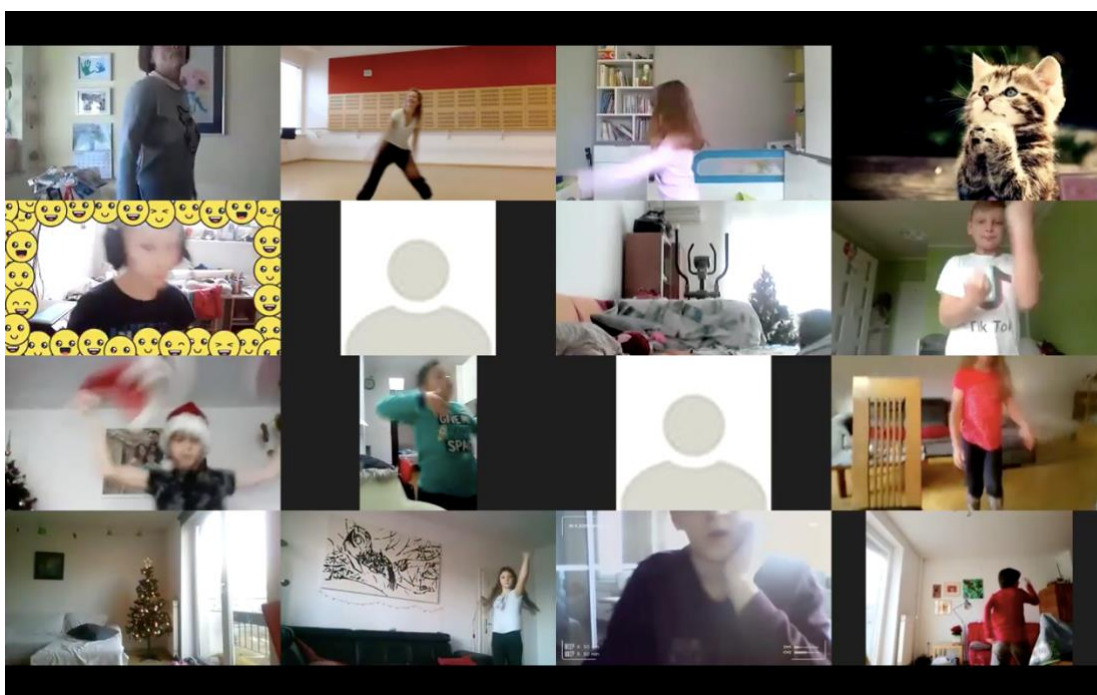


Figure 1. Creative movement workshops – Dancing on Zoom.

### ***Embodied Learning and Teaching from a Pandemic Perspective***

Slovenian researchers, Jurak et al. (2021) have found a decline in motor skills among children and adolescents and an increase in body weight during pandemic school closures. Their measurements showed that there were declines in all motor skills for both boys and girls. Declines in physical performance occurred in nearly two thirds of children, with the largest declines observed in 9-, 10- and 11-year-olds, who are otherwise among the most physically active children. The most physically active children were the most affected, while the proportion of children considered obese increased more than ever before in the history of

motor skills monitoring in Slovenia. Since aerobic endurance and physical fitness in general are also related to children's learning performance, Jurak et al. (2021) expect a decrease in children's learning ability in the "corona generation". The correlation between movement and learning ability is the foundation of embodied cognition, which points to the importance of the mind-body connection and supports greater inclusion of movement/dance activities in the learning and teaching of various school subjects (Anttila, 2015; Overby, 2014, Osgood-Campbell, 2015; Geršak & Tancig, 2018). One approach to embodied cognition is creative movement, a learning approach in which students use movement and dance to express and create different educational content. The integration of dance in the classroom becomes a means to motivate, explain and implement the subject matter and to encourage artistic experiences. This type of teaching provides students with the opportunity to express themselves non-verbally and to absorb information kinaesthetically (Kroflič, 1999). It facilitates collaboration and allows individuals to excel within a group, while encouraging the development of creativity as a personal trait (Kroflič, 1999). It also enriches perceptual thinking, imagination and divergent thinking (Kroflič, 1999). Creating through movement and dance plays an important role in shaping self-awareness, developing peer relationships and group cooperation, and facilitating and maintaining an understanding of the learning material (Anttila & Svendler Nielsen, 2019; Overby, 2014; Geršak & Tancig, 2018; Geršak et al., 2020). However, Geršak & Tancig (2018) discovered that creative movement and dance as a teaching approach, despite offering many positive effects, is not widely used in Slovenian schools.

### **Aims and Research Questions**

The purpose of the study *Dancing on Zoom* was i) to teach school subjects through the method of creative movement, ii) to address sedentariness through enriching the student's daily routine with movement and dance tasks, and iii) to maintain social contacts between peers during the distance learning period. The aim of the study was, to provide students with weekly and continuous physical activity while they learned the course content through dance.

The study intended to determine the attitudes of students, the teacher, parents, and the dancer towards online dance-movement workshops and to reveal the extent to which these attitudes are expressed in 1) the level of subject matter learned, 2) the students' experience, 4) the students' dance-movement aspect, and 5) the social aspect. The study highlights the positive effects of online creative movement workshops during isolation, while discussing possible issues and shortcomings.

In the study, we investigated the following research questions: What did creative movement approaches contribute to distance learning:

- in terms of students' learning and understanding the subject matter (RQ1)?

- in terms of students' experience and expression (RQ2)?
- in terms of students' movement and dance activity (RQ4)?
- in relation to the social aspect and interactions between students, the teacher and the dancer (RQ4)?

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The study took place remotely via the application Zoom (zoom.us) for a total of 19 learning hours. The participants in the study were 20 fourth-grade students, aged nine to ten (12 boys, 8 girls), from one Slovenian urban school, their teacher, 11 parents of the students, and a dancer. For four months, the dancer met with students and their teacher twice a week. The study covered topics from the Slovenian national curriculum for elementary schools. Through creative movement, using diverse exercises and tasks, the students explored the concepts of mathematics, Slovenian language and literary content, science and technology, social science topics, and the connection between movement and visual art and music.

The creative movement workshops were evaluated through written reflections from the students and their parents. Portions of participant reflections were included in the analyses in the form of anecdotal notes (vignettes). At the conclusion of the study, we conducted semi-structured interviews with a focus group of five students and the teacher. The interviews were conducted by the dancer, one of the authors of the paper. We recorded, transcribed, and then processed the interviews through iterative steps of qualitative content analysis. The steps we followed included editing the material, determining coding units, coding, selecting and defining relevant concepts and forming categories, defining categories, and forming the final theoretical formulation (Vogrinc, 2008). In order to get some perception of the process by the dancer, she herself completed a SWOT analysis (Silva, 2005) of the whole process, which identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the process of online teaching related to introducing the principles of creative movement into distance teaching.

At all stages of the study, we considered the ethical principles of educational research. The informed consent process for this study consisted of informing participants of the aims and protocol of the study, obtaining written informed consent, and ensuring anonymity, protection of individual identity, confidentiality, and privacy. It was explained to the participants that their participation was completely voluntary and could be withdrawn at any point.

### **Results**

The results of the semi-structured interviews with the teacher and students, and students' reflections are summarized in the following four sections: 1) Learning Material, 2) Experience and Expression, 3) Creative Movement, 4) Social Interactions (Table 1). The dancer's

opinions are expressed by means of SWOT analysis, where she identified important issues of an online teaching (e.g. Strengths: “Finding new solutions for using the creative movement approach in the online setting”; Weaknesses: “Lack of face-to-face contact with students”; Opportunities: “Connecting dance art with new technologies”; Threats: “The excuse of decision makers for a more protracted implementation of this way of schooling” (Table 2). The parents’ opinions are added in the form of vignettes embedded in the following sections.

Table 1

*Themes and categories of qualitatively processed interviews with pupils and a teacher*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>
Learning Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Effects of creative movement</li> <li>- Acquisition and understanding of learning material</li> <li>- Learning content</li> <li>- Motivation</li> </ul>
Experience and Expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Positive experiences</li> <li>- Foreign language students</li> <li>- Gender division</li> </ul>
Creative Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The importance of movement</li> <li>- Sedentary lifestyle and distance learning</li> <li>- Group dance work</li> <li>- Creativity, diversity and freedom of movement</li> </ul>
Social Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of personal contact</li> <li>- Possibility of cooperation and communication</li> <li>- Group work</li> <li>- Relationship with the dancer</li> </ul>

Table 2

*Results of SWOT analysis of a dancer*

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- an opportunity to move</li> <li>- maintaining social contacts between students</li> <li>- interactive learning and creating</li> <li>- acquiring computer literacy</li> <li>- finding new solutions for using the creative movement approach in an online setting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- not everybody has suitable technological equipment and/or a suitable room</li> <li>- technical difficulties</li> <li>- some parents do not want their child to participate in any form of online activities</li> <li>- lack of face-to-face contact with students</li> <li>- lack of group dynamics</li> <li>- lack of reading the group needs and responding appropriately</li> <li>- lack of ad hoc cooperation and spontaneous solutions</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- live online meetings to encourage experiencing and expressing through movement</li> <li>- maintaining interpersonal communication</li> <li>- exploring and introducing new solutions for similar situations in the future</li> <li>- turning physical limitations into creative strengths</li> <li>- connecting dance art with new technologies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- lack of interpersonal physical contact and touch</li> <li>- gazing at the screen too often and for too long</li> <li>- focus on the screen (two-dimensional) instead of on themselves and others in three-dimensional space</li> <li>- lack of training awareness of physical proximity to other people and peers</li> <li>- when promoting good practices in distance learning, the excuse of decision-makers for a more protracted implementation of this way of schooling</li> </ul>

***Learning Material***

The first theme, Learning Material, summarizes the categories in which the teacher observes the impact the online creative movement workshops had on student acquisition of content. The teacher and the students reported that they recalled the curricular content easiest after memorizing it through creative movement. While the parents noted the importance of the workshops in motivating children in distance learning. Regarding the acquisition and understanding of the learning material, the teacher noticed that the students memorized the learning content better through creative movement. She stated, “Yes, I had the feeling they memorized better, because they received the learning content in a different way. /.../ I thought they were very responsive and remembered better.” The teacher found the creative movement

method very suitable for conveying content to students. She reported, “The learning content is closer to them and they accept the learning material through movement, and it seems to me that this has a double effect.” The teacher emphasized the joy of the students after the establishment of the creative movement meetings. She declared, “At the beginning, it may have been strange to some of them, but in the end, they could hardly wait to meet and experience something new and interesting again.” The teacher saw the value of creative movement in all subjects, saying, “I use movement in each subject, because I think that’s very nice,” additionally, in the following paragraph we discuss few specific curriculum contents presented through creative movement approach.

According to the results, the topic of structure and function of the human body was one of the most interesting topics learned through creative movement. The teacher reported, “As for the bones and the skeleton, they remembered that there are 206 bones in our body. I think the representation of the skeleton with the movement of the bones to the music was the most interesting.” Moreover, one student remarked, “I learned how humans breathe.” In addition, the students mentioned social studies content when talking about road traffic, mentioning, “I had a lot of fun dancing in groups with traffic lights. When they were green you went fast. When they were yellow you went slowly. When they were red you had to stop.” While reading a science fiction novel in language arts, the students pointed out, “It was great when we all talked about [and showed] how we could travel into space.” The teacher noted, “I’m sure we can find a connection to movement for almost any literary text we talk about.”

In general, the students mentioned that they liked the creative movement lessons because they identified with the subject, “I also like that we are always moving on the content we worked on at school.” One of the children added, “The brain also thinks during creative movement.” Similarly, the parents noted that the movement lessons were, “very enjoyable and educational, as they combine both physical activity and elements of learning from other subjects.” At the same time, they stressed the importance of creative movement in increasing children’s motivation for both school commitments and extracurricular activities, one parent stated, “At a time when my son is struggling with motivation due to school closures (as are most of the children), the dance workshop is very refreshing. I support a continuation to the extent that it can be done.”

### ***Experience and Expression***

The second theme, Experience and Expression, includes the analysis of teacher and parental accounts of positive student experiences and the analysis of reported student enjoyment of creative movement workshops. The participation of second language learners and gender differences in responses are also discussed in order to report various experiences and ranges of expression.



First, we discuss students' experiences during the online workshops. The teacher noted that she believed the students had positive experiences of the workshops and participate well, claiming, "They are very open-minded, happy, they like it." The parents also reported their children's positive reactions to the movement lessons, claiming, ".../ he honestly couldn't wait to get some exercise with his classmates" and "Our son really loves the movement workshops. I can tell he enjoys participating and is excited to tell us afterwards what they did that day." Student responses expressed how they embraced this type of learning, disclosing, "The workshops have been very interesting", "When I am in movement workshops, I have a lot of fun." The following student reports indicate attitudes developed toward dancing during the workshops: "I discovered that I can dance very well." "Dancing is more fun than I thought before." "I dance well and now I dance in front of my classmates." They report what dance has taught them in terms of their self-awareness: ".../ that I have to trust myself."

The teacher and the dancer both noted that second language learners also participated in the workshops with a big interest. Expression through movement allowed all of the children regardless of their mother tongue to participate in the dance workshops with their embodied being, the dancer encouraged them to express their feelings and knowledge through movement and dance, often in conjunction with stimulating music. One of the boys who spoke a foreign language enthusiastically reported that he had gone "crazy" in his dance and had had an "extraordinary" experience. Similarly, other second language learners reported that free dancing with different musical impulses was one of the most enjoyable parts of the workshop. They asserted, "In the movement workshops, I like it when we dance to music because we can dance how we want" and "I enjoyed dancing freely to the music because I let myself go."

The following addresses gender-based understandings of experience and expression. Initially, the teacher was surprised that boys enthusiastically participated in the workshops, communicating, "I'm more excited about the boys. They surprised me! I don't know why we imagine that girls are more agile, that they don't have a problem with dancing. But now I felt that the boys are more motoric." The teacher pointed to an instance where one of the foreign language speaking boys took the initiative to move and inspired his classmates with his ideas. She relayed, "... / I called M. and said: 'Now you're going to lead a little exercise with music'. After that I said, 'Now someone else can lead!', and the students said, 'No, no, let M. do everything, because it's fun!'" The teacher reported that the students enjoyed the Zoom workshops even more than similar tasks at school and that they were more expressive and confident.

### ***Creative Movement***

The third theme, Creative Movement, includes opinions about the importance of movement for students during distance learning and a predominantly sedentary lifestyle; aspects of creativity, variety and freedom of movement; and a group dance work.

Within the category importance of movement the participants (teacher, dancer, parents, students) agreed that creative movement provides children with much needed exercise, which they sorely lacked during distance learning. The channeling of energy through creative movement seemed to be very important to the teacher: “It’s hard for them to move themselves when their parents aren’t home; /.../ sometimes the kids don’t even go out and for a while even the playgrounds were closed because of the epidemic.” The teacher commented, “We do so much damage to a child when we don’t allow them to move as much as possible. It seems to me that learning with the help of movement should become more important, especially now in times of pandemic, because students are really sitting in front of screens too much.”

During the first meetings, the dancer noticed that the students were stationary and that they needed extra encouragement to move and create in dance. For the dancer, the collaboration challenged her to innovate; she had to find new solutions for using the creative movement approach in an online setting. This meant turning physical limitations into creative strengths and introducing new solutions for similar situations.

One of the parents summed up the importance of physical activity during distance learning for students in their note that stated, “Basically, exercise, especially in childhood and adolescence, is necessary for overall psychophysical wellbeing, the formation and proliferation of synapses, ensuring success in school, learning positive exercise habits for life, preventing obesity”. Thus, the creative movement workshops, albeit through screens, provided needed movement for the children.

Students noted that they generally did not move much during distance learning and that the creative movement classes were therefore very important for them, saying, “Basically it was good because otherwise we didn’t move that much, we were closed all the time.” In their reflections, a majority wrote that they liked the workshops mainly because of the movement. Students reported, “I like the dance workshops a lot. I move a lot there” and “I like them the most because we always move in such an interesting way.”

In terms of creativity, diversity and freedom of movement all participants (teacher, dancer, parents, students) found the value of the workshops for children. The teacher mentioned the importance of diversity and different solutions to a particular movement-dance task stating, “We did a great job of implementing the movement-learning content, each of us did it a little

bit differently and that was it.” Since the children initially created movement on their own and then shared their dance creations with their classmates, each student observed other students’ unique solutions to the same task, thus learning about the diversity of ideas and appreciating each other’s products and performances. Performing in front of each other was also valuable for the students, reporting: “We had fun going in groups, inventing dances and dancing in front of everyone.”

In the sense of creating and performing, during the workshops, students, the teacher and the dancer created two movement videos (Figure 2 and 3), adding products to the process orientation of the activities and combining two artistic genres: dance and film. The students reported on the process of filming at home, describing, “It was fine for me too. The only problem was that if I made a mistake while filming, I had to do it again and again and again and that was hard.” They also commented on each other’s footage, saying, “You filmed like a giant was filming you.” The teacher summarized the process, reporting, “At the end of December, we shot one such video together. Everyone came up with a greeting card with movement and then the dancer put music to it. She filmed it all and then combined our footage into one video and sent it to us. The kids were happy.”

Finally, the parents lauded the creative aspect of the workshops and the variety of exercises and tasks the dancer used during the process of the workshops. Parents also found important the format of the workshops where children’s ideas, suggestions, solutions to the movement tasks were in the center of activities. They disclosed, “We think the movement workshops are well thought out because the children practice through play and fun. I also think they free them from any restrictions and encourage their creativity.”



Figure 2. The video "New Year Greeting Cards" was created at the last distance meeting in December. Each child danced their own greeting card, the dancer filmed them via Zoom, and then combined them together into a complete video that became the class New Year's greeting. Video can be viewed at <http://www.ijea.org/v23si1/v23si1.5/v23si1.5-video-1.mp4>



Figure 3. In creating the second video, "Workbook on a Trip," children were instructed to find a white wall at home, wear dark clothing, and create and dance their motif using a math workbook in front of a home camera or phone. Each recording began with the workbook being "taken out of the camera" and ended with the workbook being "passed through the camera" to the next classmate. Video can be viewed at <http://www.ijea.org/v23si1/v23si1.5/v23si1.5-video-2.mp4>

### ***Social Interactions***

The theme social interaction addresses the lack of face-to-face contact during distance learning and presents opinions on the extent to which the distance creative movement workshops contributed to collaboration and communication between classmates. Regarding the possibility of collaboration and communication as an important element of creative distance learning courses, the students mentioned the opportunity to socialize and work together with classmates, stating, “I can’t wait to start the workshops again to see my classmates” and “My favorite part was seeing my classmates and dancing together.” The parents also observed something similar: “The children experience pleasant feelings when they report live, which is enhanced by interesting movement challenges.” One of the most useful Zoom tools was the Breakout Rooms feature, which the dancer used several times in the workshops, randomly dividing the students into two groups, in which the students then created together on the topics covered. For most of the students, this was one of their favorite parts of the workshops. One stated, “My favorite part was when we were divided into groups and made movement puzzles” and another replied that her favorite was, “When we went into groups and made up a dance.” The teacher welcomed the random division into groups, because it allowed students to cooperate with classmates with whom they otherwise would not, saying, “It seems to me that it kind of bonded them and at the same time made them feel like they could work with anybody and not just with the ones they were most involved with usually.” The teacher believed that it was important to group the students together in breakout rooms in order to help them learn to adapt to others, to tolerate and respect others, to get used to a group work, and to take responsibility. She said, “They are getting used to working in groups where everyone is responsible, not just one, but everyone has to bring something to the success of the group.”

In examining the relationship with the dancer, the teacher emphasized the importance of the dancer’s approach, saying, “She has such a pleasant manner, she also jokes a bit. It’s something different and I think it’s great.” The teacher also noted the relationship the students built with the dancer, claiming, “I got the impression that they accepted her in a friendly way, that they were enthusiastic about her and the fact that the work was so relaxed /... / and at the same time she let them know that they just needed to listen and work and do their best. /... / I think she had a good connection with them.” The students express similar sentiments, stating, “The dancer is very nice and funny. This workshop is good for us because we practice a lot, so I’m very grateful to the dancer and our good teacher.”

### **Discussion**

The present study investigated the responses of students, the teacher, parents and the dancer regarding interview, SWOT analysis and written reflection questions about their experiences with distance learning and teaching through creative movement. The study functioned without

one of the main prerequisites of dance activity: the physical presence of all participants in a shared space. The online format thus closed many doors, but at the same time opened new ones for the imagination and the challenge of finding new solutions for the use of creative movement in physical isolation while maintaining social interaction and movement communication.

The responses of all those who took part in the study were positive, which might be attributed to the physical school's closure context in which the project was conducted. The pandemic situation and the emergency state in education made children grateful for this kind of experience, as did parents who noted the positive effects of creative movement classes during distance education. Both the teacher and the dancer observed that all the students participated with interest, in at least one of the segments, during the workshops.

In the study, we investigated the following research questions: What did creative movement approaches contribute to distance learning in terms of students' learning and understanding the subject matter; in terms of students' experience and expression; in terms of students' movement and dance activity; in relation to the social aspect and interactions between students, the teacher and the dancer.

### ***What Did Creative Movement Approaches Contribute to Distance Learning in Terms of Students' Learning and Understanding the Subject Matter***

The results of the qualitative processing showed that the integration of movement and dance activities in distance learning contributed to the students' acquisition and understanding of the learning material. Many authors (Anttila, 2015; Anttila & Svendler Nielsen, 2019; Geršak & Tancig, 2018; Kroflič, 1999; Overby, 2014; Geršak et al., 2020) agree that the introduction of creative movement as a learning approach may have strong effects on all areas of students' development and learning. In the present study, the students and the teacher highlighted learning topics from the fields of social science (traffic), mathematics (straight and curved lines), language (some literary texts), and arts (athlete in motion). At the same time, the students learned computer skills and operations, which allowed them to educate and empower themselves in the use of new technologies, as well as combining two media: dance and video. The teacher, the students and the parents all reported that movement and dance activities also contributed to a better understanding of some learning content, especially in the field of natural sciences: the topic of the human body, its structure and functions, which is interesting from the dance point of view as well.

***What Did Creative Movement Approaches Contribute to Distance Learning in Terms of students' Experience and Expression***

The results of the research show that students had positive experiences with the creative movement workshops and that the workshops allowed for equal participation of second language learners. Similar to the findings of Jeler et al. (2021), the teacher was surprised by the reactions of the more behaviorally challenged children and especially the boys who participated enthusiastically in the movement and dance activities. A different perspective on her students was also experienced by another teacher who brought elements of dance, visual arts, literature and drama into her distance learning classes. She, too, was particularly surprised by the boys, who were very motivated and participated in the school activities from home (Jeler et al., 2021).

***What Did Creative Movement Approaches Contribute to Distance Learning in Terms of Students' Movement and Dance Activity***

The results of the present study show that creative movement workshops conducted during distance learning were meaningful for students. The workshops gave them an opportunity to express themselves through movement, have fun and realize their own dance potential. Over the last year, when we have been forced to move learning and teaching from physical classrooms to the web due to the pandemic, the new learning environment has become not only digitized but also distinctly sedentary. The consequences of this kind of learning are already becoming evident in the decline of students' motor skills (Jurak, et al., 2021). This issue became starkly apparent during the epidemic school closures, and the consequences of a sedentary way of learning (and living) are manifested at many levels of children's development and functioning. Good practices developed during the distance education era are therefore extremely welcome and should be further developed and integrated in the face of possible further school closures due to various problems in the modern world. As Anttila (2015) states that embodied activity involving the whole body is slowly being replaced by interactions in the virtual world and as a result, understanding of physical and social reality is seriously compromised. The disappearance of physical activity is crucial for children's development, as varied physical activity is the basis for healthy development and learning, so our project was important from the perspective of integrating movement/dance into distance education.

***What Did Creative Movement Approaches Contribute to Distance Learning in Relation to the Social Aspect and Interactions Between Students, the Teacher and the Dancer***

The results of our study show that distance creative movement workshops helped to foster cooperation and communication between classmates, the teacher and the dancer as well as strengthening their teamwork and sense of belonging. Similar findings are also highlighted by Jeler et al. (2021), who emphasized the great importance of the artist-teacher collaboration in

a project from a connective perspective between the learners when teaching through a distance art experience. Medveš (2020) stated that personal contact and relationships with peers and teachers are crucial for a child's education and development. This was absent or very scarce in distance education. In addition, the epidemic prevented contact in private life and socializing with peers and classmates. It is therefore important, even in distance education, to think about personal relationships, which, although not physical, have all the dimensions of the social. This social aspect proved to be very important in our research, since all participants emphasized the importance of live meetings for students' wellbeing in relation to maintaining communication with schoolmates and positioning themselves as meaningful part of a social group of peers.

Distance learning is not only a technological and organizational venture, but also a demanding pedagogical challenge for many teachers. In situations that require distance education, teachers are forced to find pedagogical solutions that ensure a sufficient level of active participation and a sufficiently high level of student motivation. These are among the key factors in maintaining the quality of teaching and, consequently, the knowledge and education of students. The attention of students is more difficult to gain and maintain over time in distance learning, as the absence of direct physical contact between the teacher and the learner, which can be compounded by other distractions from the learner's home environment, often leads to diminished concentration and participation in the class (Štefanc, 2020). Ansio et al. (2017), described the case of the dancer's participation in a period of distance education has encouraged the breaking of some established patterns of teaching, contributing to the creation of new possibilities, approaches and meanings of education, while confirming the great importance of artists' involvement in the school space for the creation of the school of the future.

### **Conclusions**

The research presented in this paper is a pilot study and, due to the small sample, the results cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, we believe that the project is a novel example of integrating creative movement into distance learning, as our study was conducted in a completely new and exceptional situation. During a long period of four months, when schools did not have precise guidelines and strategies on how to approach distance education, this project allowed the flexibility and ingenuity of the arts to guide education. The evaluation of the project thus provides insights into the novelty of including dance art in distance education, and the findings can contribute to the further development of strategies on how to include creative movement in distance education in similar critical situations. Finally, the results of the research show the important benefits of collaboration in the learning process, for each individual student, and for their classroom community.



Despite the abundant positive feedback from all those involved in the project, it is necessary to point out some of the limitations of this type of online collaboration. It should be kept in mind that not all students have adequate technological equipment and/or a suitable room for participation and/or a socially stimulating environment, and that technical problems can occur. This can lead to widening social inequalities and discrimination. Furthermore, in online learning there is a lack of direct contact with and between children, there is a lack of group dynamics, and the gaze is focused on a two-dimensional surface instead of feeling one's own body/self and others in a three-dimensional space, resulting in a lack of training awareness in the experience of physical proximity and of interpersonal (physical) relations with other people and peers.

To end on a positive note, considering that the students and the teacher neither knew nor met the dancer in person before the start of the lessons and evaluated online study, an inspiring dance story for the twenty-first century was woven in a virtual environment during a third of a year of the stagnation of public life.

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