

EFFECT OF COMMUNITY DANCE ON CHILDREN'S SOCIALIZATION IN CREATIVE ACTIVITIES CENTERS

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Abstract

This paper aimed to examine the value and impact of community dance on the socialization of children in creative activity centers. Community dance, as an approach to human development, focuses on the acceptance of individuality, personal expression and the improvement of self-knowledge. These factors are fundamental to how a person interacts with others. The study sample consisted of twenty-two (n=22) preschool and primary school students (six-seven years and four-five years, respectively) in the context of their education in the centers of creative activities for children (KDAP). The study utilized the sociometric test of social psychology to measure the development of social relationships among the members of the two groups. The findings of the study revealed that the program had a positive impact on social relationships and affected children's cooperation and communication skills.

Key words: community dance, centers of creative activities, children socialization, communication.

Introduction

This paper attempts to investigate the social relationships of peer students in the Children's Creative Centers (KDAP) as well as their social position in their classroom network before and after a community dance program. In particular, the aim of this research was to examine the effect of a community dance program on those two factors. Community Dance offers the opportunity for people to express themselves with their bodies in an artistic context. It helps people accept and attune with their bodies; it cultivates kinesthetic ability, activates creativity, and boosts physical and mental well-being. It has great artistic and educational importance: people learn new things and develop socially since, via group work, participants become more connected to their cultures and to each other (Poynor & Simmonds, 1997). According to Johnson and Johnson (1987), classroom is the basic unit of school organization and educational activity. Sociologically, it is a small but dynamic social system, with many parameters that interact and form a peculiar dynamic in students' behavior and the development of the personality (Johnson & Johnson, 1987). The team goes through various developmental stages and degrees of acceptance. According to Tuckman and Jensen (1977), the group is initially in the process of being formed, with its members being wary and reserved because they are trying to be accepted and join the group. If acceptance is ensured, the group goes through the stormy stage, during which a phase of conflict prevails as members try to resolve their differences. In case the group passes this stage and does not dissolve, the regulatory stage follows where consensus is being prevailed, the roles are clarified, the rules are formed and the group is led to cohesion. The next stage is that of performance in which, the team now is heading towards achievement of common goals.

The phase of deconstruction or interruption of work is the final stage as long as common goals are not renewed resulting in its dissolution (Tsileponi, 2013). Community dance can act as a vehicle for shaping interpersonal relationships and behaviors between students and a medium to differentiate the degree of preferences between them (Theocharidou, 2018; Tsompanaki, 2019). Interpersonal relationships, when distinguished by quality, offer confidence, stability and sincere interest. They enhance students' self-perception and self-esteem, develop their sense of belonging and, at the same time, create an emotionally secure learning environment (Malikiosi-Loizou, 2000). Investigating interpersonal relationships between team members provides information about the social status, the role and the personality of each team member. According to Moreno (1970), the examination of social acceptance is achieved by evaluating three dimensions of a single relationship: attraction, repulsion and unconcern. Thus, when two individuals come in contact, we have alternatively three possible cases: to feel sympathy, to dislike each other, or feel indifference. To evaluate interpersonal relationships, researchers use two basic forms of sociometric measurements: a) those based on the suggestions of peers about the desired or unwanted partners (nomination measure) and b) those based on the overall rating of the team (rating measure) according to the sociometric classification of each member (Moreno, 1970). Community dance is the medium in this research that allows these societal parameters to be examined. Community dance is considered a form of art, social practice, a historical and personal expression incorporating information, experiences, and perceptions from the human path. It is suitable for anyone who just wants to relax and express themselves through dance without

making commitments and judgments about their motor skills and abilities. The Centers for Creative Activities, where this research took place, are venues of expression and creativity for children aged four to eight. The main purpose of these centers is to give children the opportunity to develop their creative skills and artistic expression according to their age and interests and are based on individual and group activities through experiential theater, play, art and dance (Lykesas, et al., 2018; Lykesas, et al., 2020).

Community dance is an interesting art form to use on these centers as it encourages students to show their uniqueness and accept individuality. It assists students to develop self-knowledge, self-esteem, and autonomy, manipulate strong emotions and thoughts, improve communication and build trust with others (MacFarlane & Pethybridge, 2016). Community dance is an aspect of participatory dance practice defined by specific values, intentions, qualities, and methodologies (Tsompanaki, 2019). The study by Lykesas et al. (2006) showed that the use of a music and movement program had a positive effect on the active participation of students in dance, increasing primary school students' fulfillment, cooperation and communicational skills (Lykesas & Zachopoulou, 2006). It concerns individuals who enjoy dancing, express themselves creatively, learn new aspects and interact with each other, as well as with different cultures (MacFarlane & Pethybridge, 2016).

Community dance classes do not aim to improve the technical skills of participants, and this is because dance is used as a creative art form. Thus, dance and movement are used as means to put emphasis on everyone's personality and uniqueness, give individuals opportunities to work collectively and gain motivation for understanding and coherence (Mosston & Ashworth, 1986; Meiners, 2014). Moreover, community dance examines how movement ensures active participation, experiential learning and contributes to the effectiveness of learning and the acquisition of special motor or general knowledge and skills. Thus, social and emotional development, development of cognitive skills, cultivation of perception, memory, language, self-concentration, self-discipline, readiness, decision-making ability and problem-solving, awareness of the social role of art, empathy are few aspects developed through community dance (Best, 2004; McFee, 2004; Davies, 2006; Redfern, 2007; Shapiro, 2008; Lykesas, et al., 2016).

Personal fulfillment is accomplished using art as a means of expression, in other words, through the creation that requires perceptual alertness, clarity of emotion, and perception of the world (Chapman, 1998). Chapman (1998) cites all of the above, arguing that the appreciation of artistic heritage and culture comes from an individual's contact with art and artworks and develops socially (learning to collaborate) and culturally (developing one's

cultural identity). The awareness of the social role of art is achieved through the very visual forms that each one creates and which help one express his/her identity and sense of belonging to a group (Amans, 2017).

As a result, in this research, community dance played a significant role in the study of children's socialization. Thus, an important element used throughout the process as a tool for experimentation and development was that of improvisation. During improvisation, participants do not process certain data to respond to the brain, instead, they spontaneously create new kinesiological ideas. Improvisation technique is adopted in community dance classes because it enables participants to lead and not follow. It triggers imagination and imagery that do not need demonstration (MacFarlane & Pethybridge, 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to examine the effect of a community dance program on the socialization of preschool and primary school students (six-seven years and five-seven years, respectively), in the context of their education at the centers of creative activities for children (KDAP).

Research questions

- A. Are there differences on each child's sociometric status before and after intervention?
- B. Are there differences on each child's peer preference before and after intervention?

Methodology

The Study Sample

The study sample consisted of twenty-two preschool and primary school students ($n=22$), between four and seven years old, from two centers of creative activities for children (KDAP1&2) in the Prefecture of Thessaloniki, Greece. Participants were divided into two groups. The first group, titled KDAP1, consisted of twelve students, six girls and six boys aged six to seven. The second group, titled KDAP2, consisted of ten students, six girls and four boys aged four to five.

Student participation in the research was voluntary, and the questionnaire were anonymous to ensure the sincerity of responses and confidentiality and that no personally identifiable information was collected. The study was conducted after obtaining written consent from all guardians of the students. The research followed the Code of Conduct for Research of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Delimitations

1. In the first group, there were twelve children aged five to seven years and in the second group, there were ten children aged four to seven.

2. The nonparticipation of children in similar out-of-school activities during the research process was confirmed.

3. All necessary equipment and materials for conducting the study belonged to the researchers.

Study Limitations and Pedagogical Challenges

This research, however, is subject to the following limitations:

1. The sample was small and only concerned children from the specific KDAP and it would not represent all comparable populations due to the generalizability issue.
2. The research findings were based on perceptions of the participants, not on the data measurements.
3. Significant progress in children's group formation and socialization requires consistent and long-term participation in community dance.
4. As each student comes from a different family, financial, and social background, the findings of the study cannot be 100% representative for all population.

Research Tools

The sociometric test of social psychology was utilized to measure the development of social relationships among the members of the two groups. The sociometric test is a simple questionnaire that is called "sociometric question" (Moreno, 1970; Pyrgiotakis, 2000).

The responses to the sociometric question lead to the preference or rejection of a person, defined by the preference criterion (Coie, Dodge & Coppotelli, 1982; Bank, 1977; Woolfolk, et al., 2008). An example of a sociometric question for the group could be: a) "Which of your classmates would you like to dance with and why?" and b) "Which of your classmates would you not like to dance with and why?"

The results from the first preferences of each group were recorded on a sociogram, which is a kind of social-emotional sketch of the group. Before the intervention, the students of the two KDAPs were asked four positive sociometric questions and four negative questions, respectively. The intervention program was a two-month ensemble community dance program. After the program was completed, the same children responded to the same questions again to compare the results. The collection process of the data was completed, so that: a) the children fully comprehend the procedure for implementation of the test, b) it was clarified that their responses were confidential and no personally identifiable information was collected or leaked, c) the participants were instructed not to talk to each other about what was discussed during the test, d) their responses were sincere and were given in absolute confidentiality, and, finally, e) they could vote up to three persons positively or negatively.

Due to the age factor, most of the children did not know how to write or read. Hence, their responses were recorded by the educator-Animator who recorded their names so that they could plan the sociometric chart later and they used a sociogram to list their responses. It is worth emphasizing that the students, by the sum of the preferences and rejections collected, can be listed in one of the five categories of the sociometric status, the social preference and popularity of the members:

- Popular students: students who mostly collect plenty of positive preferences.
- Average students: students who usually collect positive preferences but occasionally some negative votes.
- Controversial students: students who usually collect plenty of positive along with negative votes.
- Neglected students: students who usually collect a few or none of the positive or negative votes.
- Rejected students: students who mostly collect plenty of negative votes.

The study utilized the "group dynamics" program to process the data that were used to compose the sociogram.

Structure of the Class

The class was structured by four categories that are influenced by Laban's four dance elements. Each category had the following focus points: using movement as a vehicle to develop communication, acceptance of individuality, social interaction, empathy, and group work. The first category involved the body and all improvisational exercises were formed based on the exploration of the use of different body parts and movement (symmetrical, asymmetrical, curved, spiral, balance, off-balance, and more).

The second category involved space and it was used to achieve the main objective of the research. Thus, levels, directions, pathways, space architecture, materials were used to form movement improvisations. The third category entailed time as a core and examined how dynamics and qualities of movement enable us to portray situations and emotions, assist us in understanding others and allow us to decode movement to understand deeper meanings.

The fourth category focusing on relationships allowed interactions to emerge.

Statistical Analysis

The statistical package SPSS (version 20) was used for the statistical analysis. Preferences for each child (positive and negative) were expressed as means \pm standard deviation of votes. An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of votes.

Results

Both evaluations, before and after the program, were based on the sociometric test. After the processing of the "group dynamics" program, which was used to create the sociogram, some graphical representations appeared, leading to sociometric test results for both KDAP1 and 2. Also, KDAP1 (6-7 year olds) and 2 (4-5 year olds) graphs represent the girls in pink and the boys in blue.

More specifically, the following representations of Figure 1 and Figure 2 depict the children's preferences and rejections regarding members of their groups before and after the program. The numbers 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 received the

same number of positive votes from the rest of the group members both before and after the intervention. The numbers 1, 4, 5, and 7 received more positive votes after the intervention, while the number 4 received the highest positive votes, before and after the intervention. As for the negative votes represented in red, numbers 2 and 5 received the same number of negative votes before and after the intervention. The number of negative votes received by the numbers 1, 6, 8, and 9 was significantly lower than before and the number 3 received one negative vote before the intervention, although received no negative votes after the intervention. Finally, the numbers 4, 7, 10, 11, and 12 did not receive any negative votes either before or after the intervention.

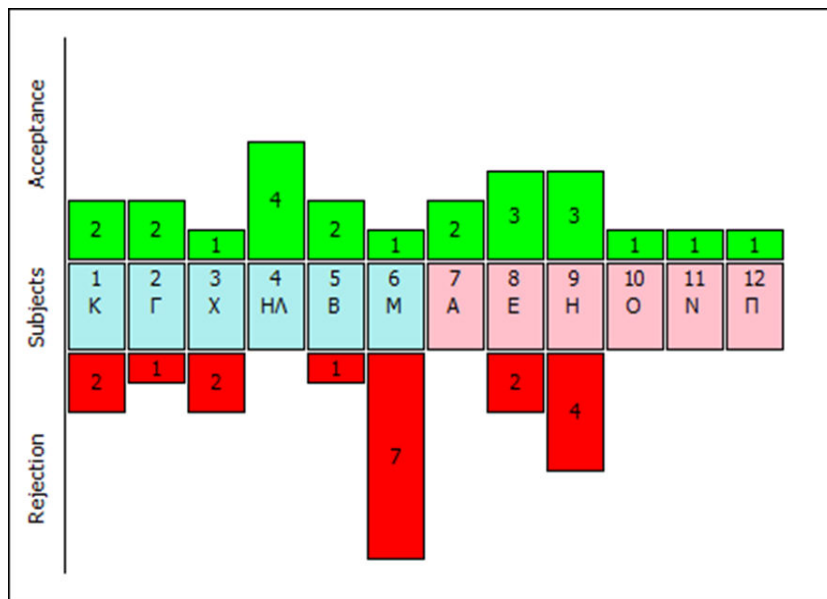


Figure 1. Graphical Representation of Preferences and Rejections for students (six-seven years old) Before the Intervention. (Greek Letters are the Initial Names of the Subjects).

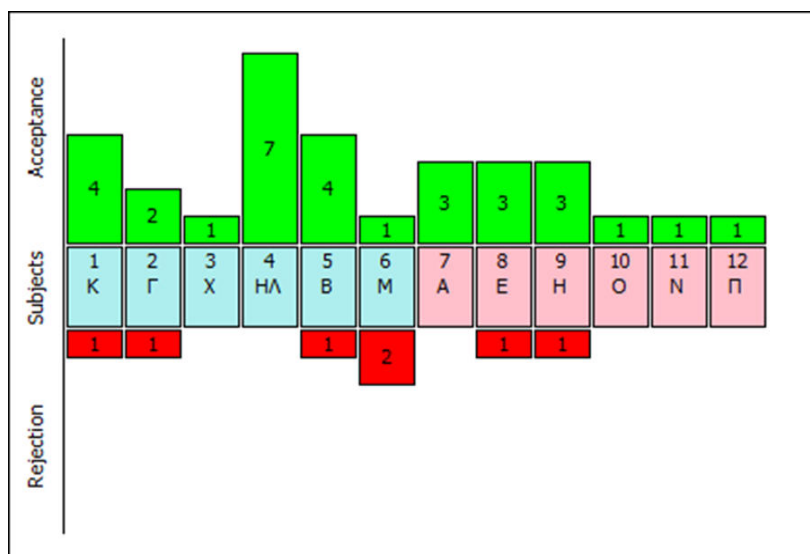


Figure 2. Graphical Representation of Preferences for students (six-seven years old) After the Intervention. (Greek Letters are the Initial Names of the Subjects)

Thus, given the sociometric status and Figure 3, considering the students, before the implementation of the program, can be categorized as follows: A) The numbers of the Popular student (A) is 4; B) The numbers of the Average students (E), (students who usually collect positive votes but occasionally some negative ones) are 1, 2, 5, 7, 10,

11, and 12; C) The numbers of the Controversial students (D), (students who usually collect plenty of positive along with some negative votes) are 8 and 9; D) There are no neglected students (C) (students who usually collect very few or no positive or negative votes); E) The numbers of the Rejected students (B) are 3 and 6.

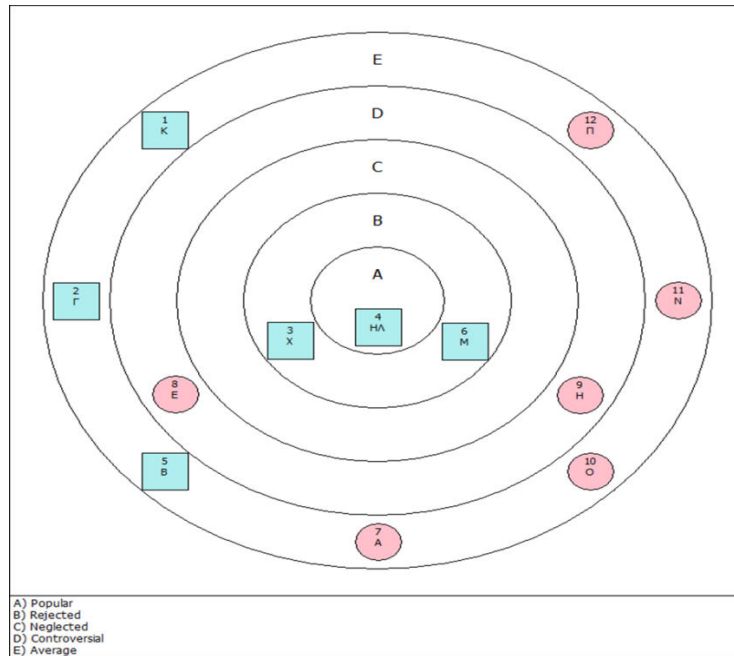


Figure 3. Sociogram for students (six-seven years old) Before the Intervention. (Greek Letters are the Initial Names of the Subjects).

The sociogram in Figure 4 reveals that there are some differences compared to Figure 3 after the intervention. The findings of the sociometric status revealed the number of the students as follows: A) The numbers of the Popular students (A) are 4 and

7; B) The numbers of the Average students (E) are 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12; C) The numbers of the Controversial students (D) are 1 and 5; D) The numbers of the Neglected students (C) is none; E) The numbers of the Rejected student (B) is 6.

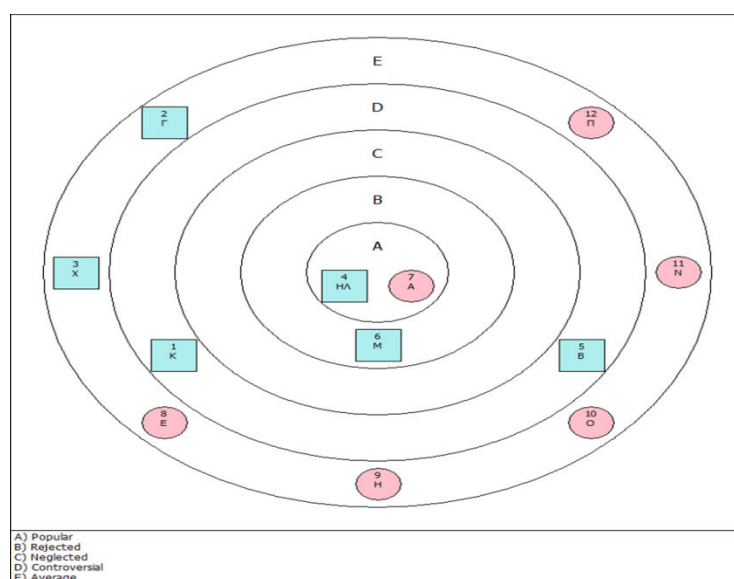


Figure 4. Sociogram for students (six-seven years old) After the Intervention. (Greek Letters are the Initial Names of the Subjects).

The graphical representation of KDAP2 (4-5 year olds) in Figure 5 and Figure 6 show that the numbers 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, and 10 received the same number of preferences from their group members, before and after the intervention. The numbers 4, 6, and 7 had a higher number of preferences after the program, while the number 9 had a lower number of positive votes. Also, in both graphical representations, number 6 received the highest positive votes, with

four and six votes before and after the intervention, respectively. As for the negative votes, represented in red, the numbers 2 and 7 received fewer negative votes after the program than the number of votes received before the intervention. In contrast, numbers 3 and 5 did not receive any negative vote, while the number 5 received five votes. The rest of the numbers did not receive any negative votes either before or after the intervention.

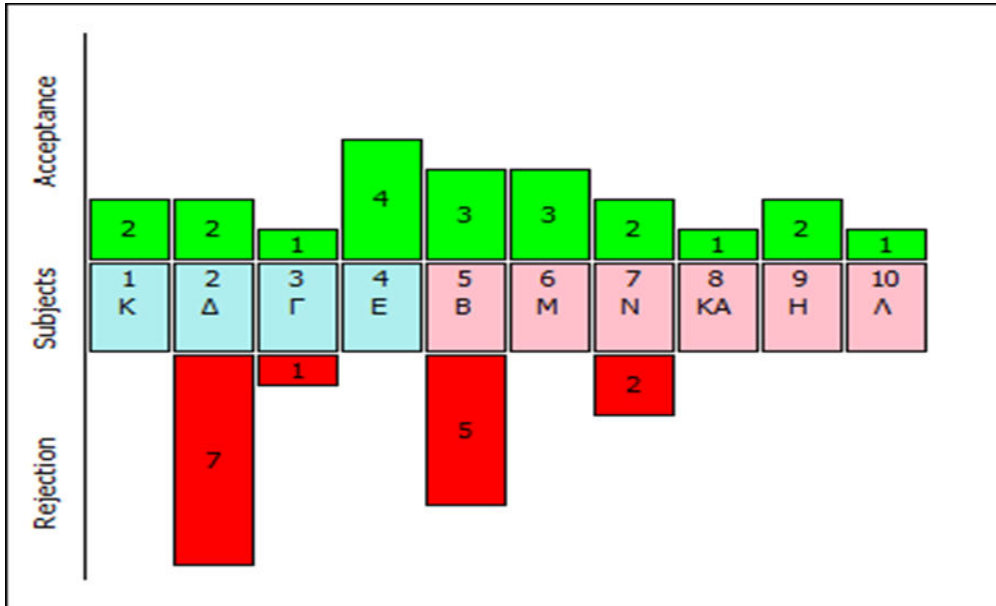


Figure 5. Graphical Representation of Preferences and Rejections for students (four-five years old) Before the Intervention. (Greek Letters are the Initial Names of the Subjects).

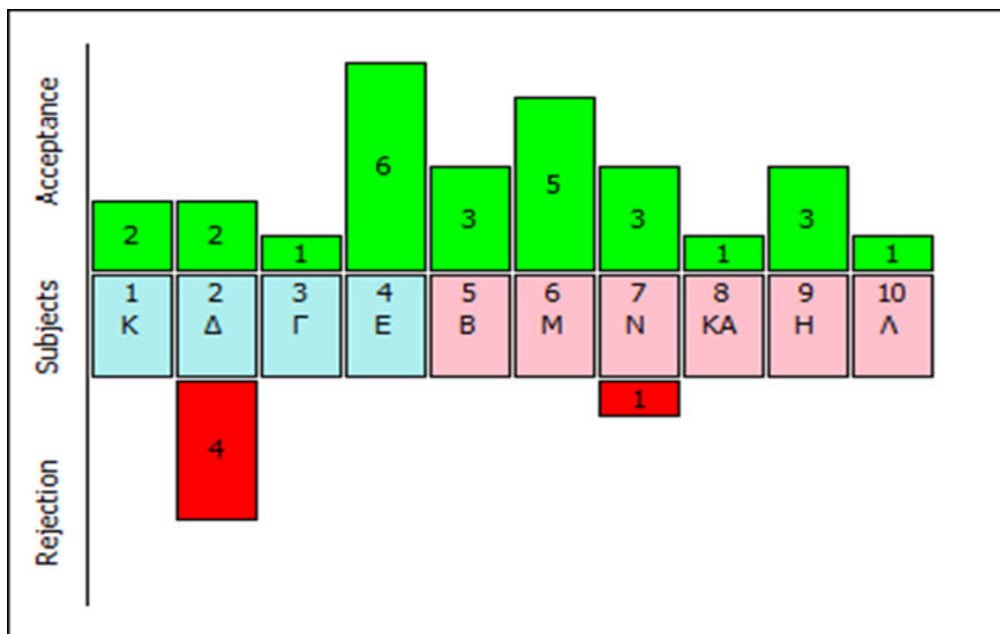


Figure 6. Graphical Representation of Preferences and Rejections for students (four-five years old) After the Intervention. (Greek Letters are the Initial Names of the Subjects).

Figure 7 reveals the sociometric categories from the results obtained before the intervention: A) The numbers of the Popular students (A) are 4 and 6; B) The numbers of the Average students (E) are 1,

3, 7, 8, 9, and 10; C) The numbers of the Controversial student (D) is 5; D) There are no neglected students (C) and E) The numbers of the Rejected student (B) is 2.

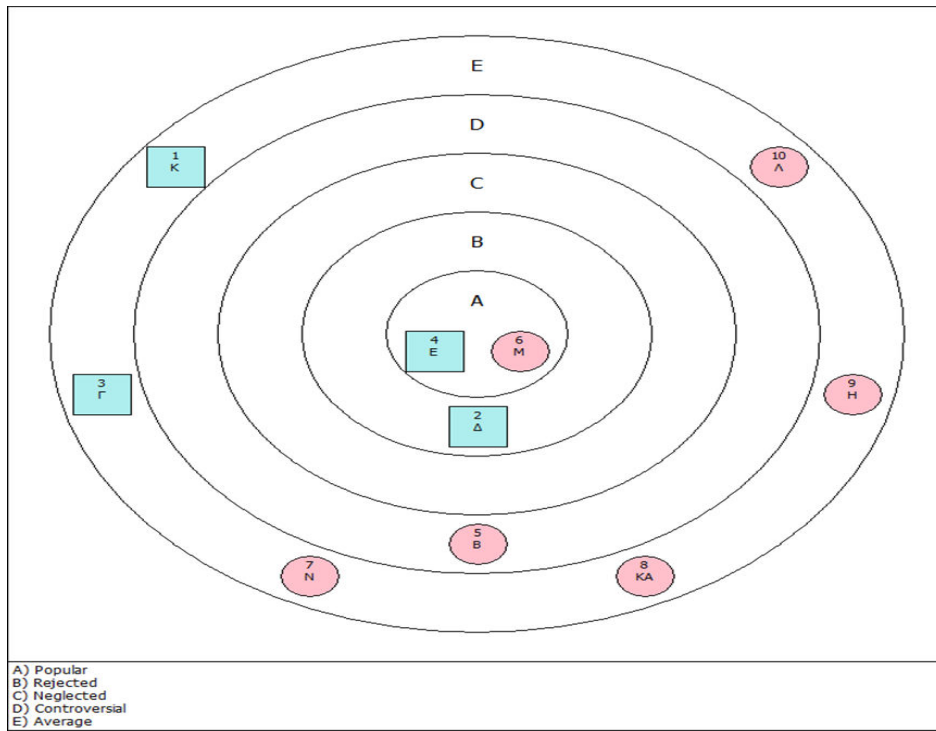


Figure 7. Sociogram for students (four-five years old) Before the Intervention. (Greek Letters are the Initial Names of the Subjects).

Figure 8 shows the sociometric status that emerged after the intervention: A) The numbers of the Popular students (A) are 4 and 6; B) The numbers of the Average students are 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, and

10; C) There are no Controversial students (D) or D) Neglected students (C) and E) The numbers of the Rejected student (B) is 2.

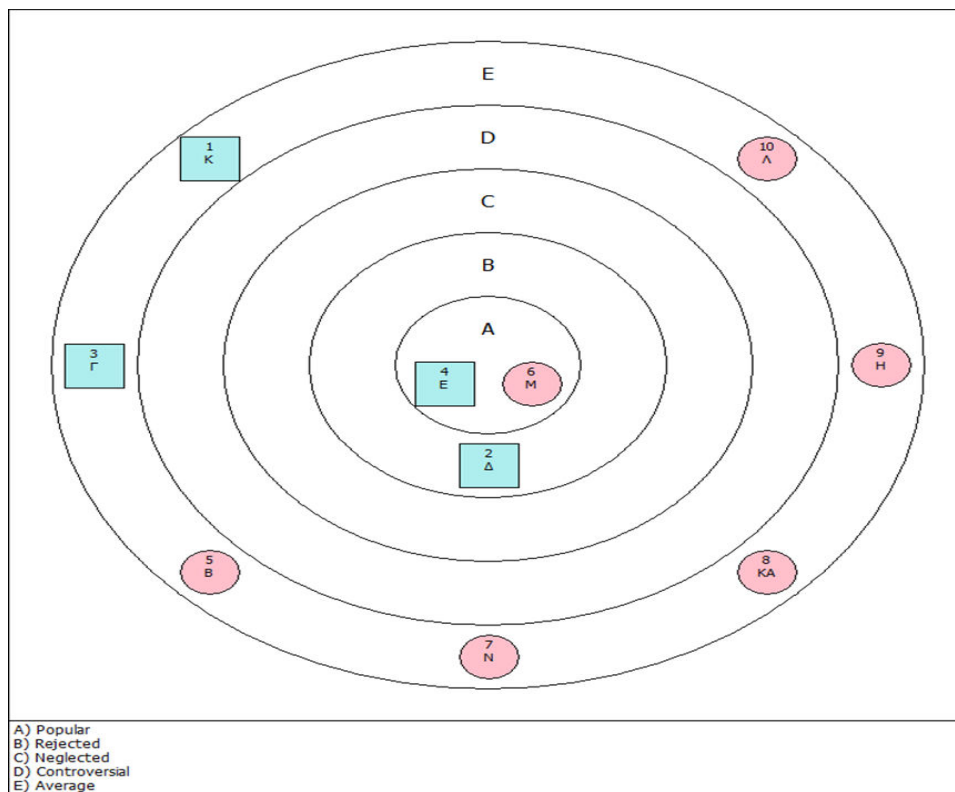


Figure 8. Sociogram for students (four-five years old) After the Intervention. (Greek Letters are the Initial Names of the Subjects).

Regarding the results of the sociogram, in relation to the age of the students, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores

of 6-7 year olds and 4-5 year olds. Table 1 gives the results in brief:

Table 1. The Results of the Sociogram, in Relation to the Age of the Students.

POLL	KDAP	N	Mean	SD
Positive votes given before the intervention	KDAP 1	12	1.9167	.66856
	KDAP 2	10	1.9000	.73786
Positive votes received before the intervention	KDAP 1	12	1.8333	.93744
	KDAP 2	10	1.9000	.99443
Negative votes given before the intervention	KDAP 1	12	1.6667	1.15470
	KDAP 2	10	1.5000	.84984
Negative votes received before the intervention	KDAP 1	12	1.6667	2.10339
	KDAP 2	10	1.5000	2.50555
Positive votes given after the intervention	KDAP 1	12	2.5833	.51493
	KDAP 2	10	2.7000	.48305
Positive votes received after the intervention	KDAP 1	12	2.5833	1.83196
	KDAP 2	10	2.7000	1.70294
Negative votes given after the intervention	KDAP 1	12	.5833	.66856
	KDAP 2	10	.5000	.52705
Negative votes received after the intervention	KDAP 1	12	.5833	.66856
	KDAP 2	10	.5000	1.26930

In the following eight questions (Table 1), the significant value ($p > .05$) is higher in all cases. The findings depict that, in each test, there are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of 6-7 year olds and 4-5 year olds. Consequently the different age groups did not affect the results of the sociogram.

Discussion

The program was designed based on the Experiential Approach to Learning (project method) and used community dance as a tool for learning and creating social, moral and emotional development, with a purpose of the comprehensive development and smooth socialization of students. The children participating in the intervention program, after understanding the questions and receiving clear explanations by the teacher, they gave sincere responses without being influenced by the teacher. The educator-facilitator was then responsible for recording their responses on the sociogram.

The findings of the sociogram answered two hypothetical questions. The first question was whether students maintained preferences for a friend and the second one referred to whether the isolated students joined the group after the program.

The findings of the research revealed that children in KDAP 1 (6-7 year olds) and 2 (4-5 year olds) centers, before intervention, had specific preferences regarding some members of their group. Nevertheless, they gave more positive votes and less negative ones after the intervention. Also, rejected students received significantly fewer negative votes after the experiential program than before, and initially neglected students integrated into the rest of the group smoothly. More specifically, the two sociograms for KDAP 1 (six-seven years old students) presented by Figure 3

and Figure 4 showed positive results. Before the intervention, the number 4 was popular (A), while the number 7 was added after the intervention. Regarding the rejected persons (B), there were only numbers 3 and 6 in this category before the program, while afterward, there was only the number 6 which had fewer negative votes than the beginning. Student number 3 moved to the "average students" category. There were no neglected students (C) reported throughout the study. In the other categories at the same time, it was observed that the numbers 8 and 9, that previously belonged to the contradictory students (D), after the intervention were categorized as average ones (E). Finally, students 1 and 5, who were categorized as the average students, after the intervention they categorized as contradictory students. The findings of two sociograms presented in Figure 7 and Figure 8, we draw positive conclusions about the second center (KDAP 2: four-five years old students). More specifically, popular students were the same numbers 4 and 6 before and after the program, average students were the same numbers, except for the number 5 who was in the contradictory students before the program and then joined the average students' category. The number 2 in both sociograms continued to be rejected but with the difference that after the accomplishment of the program, he/she had much fewer negative votes than he/she had previously. Finally, there were no neglected students in either sociogram. Moreover, the results revealed the program had a positive effect on the social relations that the students developed in KDAP 1 (6-7 year olds) and KDAP 2 (4-5 year olds) centers. Students, therefore, improved their collaborative and communication skills by responding positively to the corresponding hypothetical question developed by the teacher. Moreover, the study used a t-test for independent cases to examine whether the age of the students affected sociogram results. The results showed that both (six-seven and four-five)

age categories do not have an effect on the sociogram's results. Students developed more cooperation and communication skills after the accomplishment of the intervention (Kokkidou, 2014; Meiners, 2014).

The findings of this research cannot be considered 100% representative for each child, because of each participant's different family, economic, and social background. Therefore, future studies on students in this context should also consider their differences. The findings of the study revealed that community dance plays an important role in socialization and the grouping of preschool and primary school students. However, the results of the survey (reliability) would not represent all comparable populations due to the generalizability issue and the scope of the study sample.

Concerning the social factor of a community dance and community art in general, the National Art Education Association (NAEA) seems to agree on its value and importance in education. Students' success in education lies in the creation of an educated, creative society (NAEA, 1996). Therefore, art, in general, creates cultures and builds civilizations offering important values to society. Theater, music, dance, visual arts and poetry help students understand human experiences, teach them to respect different ways of thinking and acting, and share their ideas and feelings in several ways (Kuppers & Robertson, 2007; Lykesas, et al., 2018). Movement in physical expression and dance is related to emotional expressions, social interactions, and community involvement (Tsouvala

& Magos, 2016). In this way, the movement allows a multidimensional connection to be formed in relation to holistic development of an individual, influencing knowledge in that way and well-being in a school environment. This is the reason why the community dance and any creative movement activity can play a useful role, even in preventing mental problems and social exclusion in children and adolescents (Magos & Tsouvala, 2011; Anttila & Jussila, 2017).

Educators should focus on the natural urge of children to move and include movement activities in their curricula and art in general, because in this way today's children as tomorrow's citizens will be "multi-literate" and will be able to express more opinions in more ways (Kokkidou, 2014). The use of movement in education through creative processes (the community dance in this case) makes the students critical thinkers and eager learners. Community dance enables knowledge to arise using game and movement as a more common way for a child (Meiners, 2014; Karkou, et al., 2016; Tsompanaki, 2019; Lykesas, et al., 2020).

Society and educational systems should, therefore, meet modern needs and offer children opportunities for their emotional and moral development, to acquire perceptual skills, develop intrapersonal and interpersonal values, become complete personalities, responsible and conscious citizens. Dance is mostly connected to physical development and skills but, community dance does not focus on those skills, it is instead considered a tool for holistic development.

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