

# Dance can help improve young children's social skills

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This research was conducted by **Yovanka B. Lobo and Adam Winsler** at **George Mason University, USA**

## Summary

The paper reports the results of an experiment in the US where young children from low-income families participated in a creative dance programme. When compared with a control group, the children in the dance programme significantly improved in social competence and reduced behaviour problems.

The sessions took the form of a greeting, warm-up and stretch followed by some vigorous activity on the spot, the experimenter would then tell a story and the group would improvise a dance, the session would end with more stretching accompanied by soothing music. There were two sessions a week, each lasting 35 minutes. The control group was given supervised play, much like would take place in the regular classroom.

## 40 children were recruited from one pre-school programme

21 were randomly assigned to the dance group and 19 to the control group. The children were aged between 3 and 5, with equal numbers of boys and girls. The majority was non-white and all were from deprived households. Parents and teachers completed a standardised and well-validated test (the Social Competence Behaviour Evaluation: Preschool Edition) asking about the children before and after the programme. Neither the parents nor the teachers knew to which group the children had been assigned.

# The authors are not certain what elements of the dance programme made the difference to the children

Social competence is defined as the ability to make and maintain friendships, gain entry to groups and communicate effectively. The sessions allowed the children to connect with others across language and culture barriers, and the informality of the setting may also have helped this process. It may have been particularly effective given the background of the children. The authors note that music was a key element in the programme and may be responsible for creating some of the effects.

## Keywords

**music** **USA** **behaviour** **control group** **dance** **children**

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Author email	<a href="mailto:awinsler@gmu.edu">awinsler@gmu.edu</a>

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