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Ballroom Dance: An Education Like No Other

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Dance is fundamental to the human spirit. Throughout the ages dance rituals have brought our ancestors love, health and prosperity. As early as 1.8 million years ago when hominids began to stand upright, dance-like full body movement allowed for what is thought to be the precursor to modern language (Brown & Parsons, 2008). Since then human-kind has used dance to tell stories, celebrate, and worship the gods.

Despite the paucity of studies, the medical research to date has consistently shown neurological benefits of dance both physically and mentally. Dance is more than entertainment; it is important in building neural circuitry, and these connections translate into improved functioning in daily life activities.

Societies throughout history have learned dance and used it in their cultural experiences and formal education. In the United States, dance has been a part of public education since at least the 1900s (see report by Bonbright & Bradley, 2013). In the 1920s over half of the US public schools taught some form of partner dance. Yet by the 2000s only 20% of elementary schools offered dance. Clearly, the trend in teaching dance has shifted throughout time. This leads one to ask, has our current culture changed priorities to the extent that dance is no longer important? Does scientific evidence exist to justify a shift in priorities away from dance?

Dance currently falls somewhere between the arts and physical education. As a result, it can sometimes fall through the cracks of both programs. Arts programs primarily focus on visual and fine arts, while physical education programs cater primarily to sports activities. In an effort to prioritize activities for each program, dance is often left out of both programs rather than having an increased opportunity for receiving support. Consequently, funding is lost for dance programs, opportunities decline, students do not actively seek participation, and little scientific research is performed on the topic of dance to promote its continuation in the education system.

Despite the paucity of studies, the medical research to date has consistently shown neurological benefits of dance both physically and mentally. Dance is more than entertainment; it is important in building neural circuitry, and these connections translate into improved functioning in daily life activities. Dance

uses mental skills that strengthen the neural pathways employed in academic tasks, social interaction, and motor-perception. Additionally, dance is a form of exercise that people are willing to do in order to meet their cardiovascular needs. Participants enjoy dance, and most intend to continue dancing as a life-long form of physical activity.

Therefore, questions that we as educators should consider are the following: What are the benefits of dance to the individual and society? If these benefits are publically known and determined to be important, will dance once again become a priority to the education curriculum? This review outlines the benefits of ballroom dance and includes an informal study presenting the feedback from students enrolled in a ballroom class at Piedmont Virginia Community College (PVCC).

BENEFITS

Dancing long been known to aid in proprioception, balance, flexibility, coordination and motor movements (Alpert, et al., 2009) as well as to provide musical sensitivity and emotional connection (Lee, Mama, Medina, Orlando Edwards, & McNeill, 2011; Sevdalis & Keller, 2012). As a form of physical activity, dance improves cardiovascular function, lowers the risk of diabetes and contributes to weight loss and decreased BMI (Lee, et al., 2011; Nelson, et al., 2011).

Ballroom dance, a specific form of partnered dance, shares in these benefits; however it is unique in that it also relies on communication between a leader and a follower. The role of the leader is to initiate movements by signaling a follower, and the role of the follower is to perceive and respond to the leader's stimulus. This requires an amount of cognitive flexibility and social intelligence.

Many forms of ballroom, also referred to as social dance, exist and can be classified into four general categories based on the timing, style, and footwork. Standard/smooth dances are typically what come to mind when the term ballroom is used. These dances glide or move fluidly across the dance floor and include the Viennese waltz, slow waltz, foxtrot, tango and quickstep. Latin and rhythm dances end to be more stationary and contain more expressive body and hip movement. These dances include cha-cha, rumba, bolero, swing, jive, mambo and samba. Club dances such as west-coast swing, hustle, and salsa are predominately danced socially to modern music. The last category, folk/country dances, includes dances such as the polka and two-step. Ultimately, ballroom dancers must be kinesthetically skilled at many dances.

While all of the fundamental aspects of dance including balance, linear and turning movements, timing, musicality, muscle coordination and endurance exist in these dances, ballroom dancers must navigate an added layer of a social partnership. Consequently both the leader and follower must use executive cognitive functions, musicality, motor skills, and social-emotional intelligence to engage successfully in dancing. As a result, training in ballroom dance

allows individuals to strengthen their abilities in all of these areas while participating in a physically demanding activity.

Physical activity

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that almost half of adults in high-income countries are physically inactive. The amount of physical activity the CDC suggests for adults is 2 hours and 30 minutes (150 minutes) of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (i.e., brisk walking) every week in addition to muscle strengthening activity at least twice a week. Lack of physical activity can lead to increased chronic illness (e.g., diabetes, obesity, and heart disease), decreased quality of life, impaired cognition, and psychological distress, and can create a financial burden on the individual and society (Karmisholt & Gotzsche, 2005; Karmisholt, Gyntelberg, & Gotzche, 2005). Since large numbers of people are not meeting the guidelines for physical activity, it is important to identify a program or programs of activity that will be initially appealing and foster sustained interest.

A prime motivator towards engagement in physical activity for both genders is interest or enjoyment (Domene, Moir, Pummell, & Easton, 2014). Therefore, promoting activities that people find enjoyable can lead to increased health as a result. Adolescent females, in particular, report dance as the exercise of choice (Lee, et al., 2011). Both males and females report enjoyment of dance activities and express plans to continue dance after taking ballroom lessons (Domene, et al., 2014).

Ballroom dance provides children through adults an opportunity to meet the recommended moderate-high intensity activity. A study of children in a New York City public elementary school ballroom class pilot program showed that over 75% of students reached moderate to vigorous activity for greater than 50% of class time and resulted in a decrease in Body Mass Index (BMI) (Huang, Hogg, Zandieh, & Bostwick, 2012). A similar study reported that students enrolled in an after school dance program including ballroom dances such as cha-cha, mambo and swing, demonstrated significant improvements in BMI and endurance in overweight children ages 9-11 after 16 weeks of participation (Nelson, et al., 2011). Biochemical measurements reflecting heart disease and type 2 diabetes, known risks of obesity, also improved.

Studies of adults have shown similar results. A study of adult men and women, ages 27-57, found that Latin social dance demanded moderate to vigorous activity as measured by accelerometer and heart rate monitors (Domene & Easton, 2014; Domene, et al., 2014). Salsa dancing, in the form of lessons or social activity at clubs, resulted in moderate level intensity exercise as defined by heart rate (Emerenziani, et al., 2013). Salsa was also shown to provide a safe and enjoyable form of exercise for children through elderly adults (Emerenziani, et al., 2013; Granacher, et al., 2012). Elderly patients who participated in a variety of ballroom (foxtrot, waltz, rumba, swing, samba and bolero) experienced a significant reduction in weight (Borges, et al., 2012). In patients with chronic heart failure, waltz dancing improved cardiovascular functional capacity similar to traditional

exercise (Belardinelli, Lacalaprice, Ventrella, Volpe, & Faccenda, 2008). Patients with depression reported increased mood after participating in Latin dance (Hackney & Earhart, 2010; Zajenkowski, Jankowski, & Kolata, 2014). The physical benefits of ballroom dance for children through adults are numerous.

The concept of participation in physical activity has long been established as a factor to improve health, yet new evidence suggests that social dance may be particularly motivating. A study by Domene and colleagues compared physical outcome measures of 100 people with type 2 diabetes and/or obesity who participated in either a self-selected physical activity or ballroom classes. Both groups attained a significant decrease in body weight and waist circumference as well as increased metabolic control; however, only the ballroom group maintained interest in the class up to and beyond 6 months (Domene, et al., 2014). These results emphasize that while any exercise is beneficial, ballroom dance may provide a more consistent form of physical activity due to participant compliance and a desire to continue. This comparison is striking in that even though the PA group self-selected their preferred mode of exercise, the participants in the ballroom class were motivated to maintain physical activity beyond the self-selected group. Similar preferences to ballroom dance as a form of exercise have been demonstrated in studies for patients with congestive heart failure (Belardinelli, et al., 2008) and mental illness (Hackney & Earhart, 2010).

One theory to explain this preference is increased motivation due to social support. Social dance provides human interaction and community that other forms of exercise generally do not provide. It can be tailored for specific age groups or serve as a way to interact across generations. Learning to dance, therefore, is a good option for individuals to become involved in an enjoyable activity that can lead to sustained, improved physical health for a wide variety of populations.

Bodily-kinesthetic

From a neurological view, dance is a complex sensorimotor activity that uses proprioception, rhythm and spatial awareness (Sevdalis & Keller, 2011). As ballroom dancers move around the floor they must navigate around other dancers and judge their own spatial possibilities and their relationship with a partner. As a result, dancers develop a heightened bodily kinesthetic and spatial awareness (Fonseca, Thurm, Vecchi, & Gama, 2014). To demonstrate this Fonseca and colleagues compared 30 volunteers, ages 21-60, of whom 15 participated in a dance class and 15 enrolled in classroom training on body perception. Dancers improved in body perception by 40% while the control group paradoxically decreased in perception accuracy (Fonseca, et al., 2014).

The importance of accurate body perception extends beyond the dance floor. Increased body perception in combination with spatial cognition could potentially help students learn new procedural skills and lead students toward mastery. At the psychological level, accurate appraisal of one's self can lead to greater self-esteem and confidence (Willinge, Touyz, & Charles, 2006). Physiologically, an accurate perception of one's body can lead to a more

accurate estimate of one's dietary needs and greater health by lowering the risk of illness from being either overweight or underweight (Squiers, et al., 2014).

Neuroscientists have studied the brain changes result from dance training. One example occurs in the neuronal suppression of vestibular dizziness. Studies of ballerinas, many of whom have spent years performing pirouette-like movements, demonstrate changes in the cerebral cortex and cerebellum, areas of the brain responsible for the perception of dizziness (Nigmatullina, Hellyer, Nachev, Sharp, & Seemungal, 2015). Ballroom dancers also participate in a variety of spinning movements whether in the partnered turning of the Viennese waltz and polka or the individual spins practiced in salsa, jive or rumba. During a spin, the vermis of the cerebellum receives sensory input of dizziness from the inner ear. This information is then relayed to the cerebral cortex which activates the perception of dizziness. In dancers the size of the vermis is reduced thereby decreasing the signal sent to the cerebral cortex (Nigmatullina, et al., 2015). The result is less cortical activation and less dizziness. Practical applications of a suppressed perception of dizziness include a possible treatment of chronic dizziness and stability in the elderly as well as the universal benefit of greater stability in navigating every-day life.

In addition to turning actions, a considerable amount of straight walk balancing footwork is also involved in ballroom dance. This balancing footwork has led researchers to study the effectiveness of ballroom as a form of therapy for the elderly and people with neurological conditions such as Parkinson's disease (PD).

A main concern of the elderly is decreased mobility along with loss of balance. Elderly patients who participated in the waltz, foxtrot and tango improved significantly on balance, walk distance, and backward stride length (Hackney & Earhart, 2009). Additionally, elderly subjects in long-term institutional care who participated in a variety of ballroom dance (foxtrot, waltz, rumba, swing, samba and bolero) experienced a significant reduction in weight as well as a significant increase in functional autonomy (Borges, et al., 2012). Specifically, patients developed better balance and posture as measured by stabilometer and posture meter platforms, respectively. These benefits are particularly important for the elderly as they sharpen their sense of balance and lower the risk of injury due to falls (Borges, et al., 2012).

Further studies of balance and mobility have examined the therapeutic benefit of ballroom dancing on patients with PD. Parkinson's Disease is characterized by loss of balance, frequent falls, altered gait, and motor impairment. Research indicates that ballroom dances including tango, waltz and foxtrot may improve walking velocity and stride length for people diagnosed with PD (Hackney & Earhart, 2009). Additionally, balance and gait also improved after sessions of ballroom dance (Hackney & Earhart, 2010). These results were particularly striking in tango.

Tango may be particularly helpful in people with PD due to the similarities with therapeutic movements to those taught by physical therapists in order to relieve

symptoms such as freezing of gait. Argentine tango, for example, consists of rhythmic rocking and stepping over or tapping a partner's foot. These movements are similar to the side to side rocking and stepping movements advised by physical therapists to PD patients in order to escape a freezing spell.

Reports of significant increases in stride length and velocity have also been reported in healthy adults (Granacher, et al., 2012) and adults with serious mental illness (Hackney & Earhart, 2010) after participation in salsa lessons for 8-10 weeks. Salsa, unlike waltz and foxtrot or tango, involves quick leg movements in short, compact strides. Two possible theories may explain the similar results. Throughout the standard/smooth dances long, reaching strides are fundamental to the gracefulness of the dance while quick, short steps are often required for Latin dances such as salsa. These types of movements are likely helpful in gait and leg movement. Dancing with a partner to music may provide additional visual and auditory cues to encourage increased speed of movement. Learning to dance may be beneficial in both treating mobility difficulties and preventing future problems. The benefits of increased balance, posture, and reaction times continued into old age for dancers who had been dancing for many years and these skills continue to improve with dancer expertise (Kattenstroth, Kalisch, Kolankowska, & Dinse, 2011).

Cognitive

Less well-known are the cognitive benefits of ballroom dance. New research suggests that ballroom dancing may contribute to improvement spatial cognition and executive function (Akbaraly, et al., 2009; Karmisholt, et al., 2005; McKee & Hackney, 2013; Verghese, et al., 2003).

A recent report of dance in K-12 education by the National Dance Education Organization suggests a correlation between expressive kinesthetic learning and academic achievement (Banbright & Bradley, 2013). Youth involved in dance earn higher GPAs and attend higher education more than their peers who are not in dance programs. While these studies are not specific to ballroom dance, they do emphasize a need for further research in this area.

Increasing evidence shows that participation in leisure activities may be a preventative factor for dementia. In June of 2003, the New England Journal of Medicine published a study on leisure activities and the risk of dementia in the elderly. In this study Verghese and colleagues followed 469 subjects aged 75 and older who did not have dementia at baseline. Over a median follow up period of 5.1 years participants involved in cognitive leisure activities reported significantly lower incidences of dementia. Strikingly, dancing was the only physical activity that resulted in a significantly lower accounts of dementia, lower than purely cognitive activities including doing crossword puzzles, reading or playing an instrument (Verghese, et al., 2003).

In a study on adapted tango as an intervention for PD, McKee and Hackney (2013) reported an increase in both spatial cognition and executive function after twenty, 90-minute sessions over a 12 week period with retention gains for 10 to 12 weeks post-participation. To control for the documented beneficial

cognitive effects of social interaction, researchers used an interactive education class to serve as a non-dance control (McKee & Hackney, 2013). Spatial abilities are important for reading maps, performing mental rotations and judging spatial relationships in other areas including math, science and engineering.

How does ballroom dance increase cognitive skills? One possibility is due to the use of executive function though constant planning and re-planning of one's steps across the dance floor. This skill of "floor craft," making alterations in the figures used and direction of movement based on the position of other dancers and objects in the room, integrates the executive function of cognitive flexibility. Cognitive flexibility is the skill of restructuring one's thinking based on the changing demands of the situation and therefore being able to reorganize one's thoughts about the same concept in multiple ways. In social dancing cognitive flexibility can also occur when a figure is either poorly led or misinterpreted, thus requiring a recovery maneuver to keep the dance moving on tempo.

Dancing also uses working memory. There is generally no step by step book to follow while one is learning figures in ballroom dance. Therefore learning dance figures requires the use of working memory to store observed movements before manipulating the recalled information and translating it into physical movement.

Dancing employs a variety of brain areas involved in credibility, expression and musicality. In a lead-and-follow setting, dancers have the challenge of moving with the timing and rhythm of the music while remaining in synchrony with a partner. As a result, dancers increase their sills at musical interpretation and timing recognition (Gentry, 2004)

Ballroom dance classes require participants to attend to the music while simultaneously recalling learned movements and utilizing executive function to interpret signals in relationship to a partner. The mentally challenging aspects of dance – performing complex movements, moving in synchrony, and following a planned spatial path – assist in strengthening neural connections and prepare students for utilization of these skills in other areas.

Social - Emotional

Physical exercise has been shown to improve mood through the release of serotonin and other mood in neurotransmitters. Similarly, dance has been shown to regulate mood both increasing positive feelings and decreasing negative feelings in both short- and long-term studies (Estivill, 1995). Participants express enjoyment with ballroom dancing (Belardinelli, et al., 2008; Hackney & Earhart, 2010; Nelson, et al., 2011), and this may contribute to improved mood. In a study of mood changes and dancing, participants reported increased energy, improved mood, and lowered tension after dancing (Zajenkowski, et al., 2014). In an open response survey participants in Latin dance salsa lessons reported a positive experience, more confidence, and less anxiety; these positive experiences were attributed to opportunity to learn new things and to

be a part of a fun group (Hackney & Earhart, 2010). Another study found the highest rated perceived benefit of Latin partnered dance was psychological improvement (Domene, et al., 2014).

Dancing has been documented across cultures as a psychosocial intervention for people in skilled care facilities (Guzman-Garcia, Hughes, James, & Rochester, 2013) resulting in improved social interaction, decreased behavior problems, increased enjoyment in both patients and care providers. Social dancing has been used as a nursing intervention to support positive feelings of support and communication between caregivers and patients with dementia (Palo-Bengtsson & Ekman, 2002). In Brazil, Latin dance residents of a dementia healthcare facility reported increased socialization as competence improved participants reported increased pride and enjoyment (Guzman-Garcia, Mukaetova-Ladinska, & James, 2013).

In PD patients with mild depression, participation in social dance resulted in mood improvement, reduction in anger, and decreased fatigue when compared to matched controls over a 10 week period (Lewis, Annett, Davenport, Hall, & Lovatt, 2014). In a pilot study of geriatric depression, participant feedback indicated immense enjoyment at the sessions and pleasure in learning the dances and hearing the music (Haboush, Floyd, Caron, LaSota, & Alvarez, 2006). Another pilot study on social dance for people with mental illness found improvements in anxiety and depression with patients reporting enjoyment and a desire to continue (Hackney & Earhart, 2010).

Social interaction with a partner is one of the positive and yet challenging aspects of ballroom dance. Positive relationships are integral to life satisfaction and the key contributor to well-being among very happy people (Diener & Seligman, 2002). Many people view ballroom dance as a way to meet new people and interact socially. The challenge, however, can be learning how to interact with people while on the dance floor.

In addition to basic skills such as asking someone to dance and carrying on a conversation, social dance requires a quick assessment of a partner's dance skills. At times, dancers may need to know how to graciously decline. In the classroom setting partners must work as a team to master new figures while on the dance floor individuals must hold the impulse to correct a partner's dancing mistakes.

Therefore in order to be a recreational dancer, participants must develop social intelligence. A socially aware dancer will be careful not to out-perform the current dancer partner or make the dance moves so difficult that the other feels uncomfortable. The goal for social dancing is to ensure that both people have fun and look their best. These lessons in politeness, preserving another's dignity, and social conversation are pivotal for navigating through relationships at work, home, and school as well as in dance. Ballroom dance class provides a unique opportunity to practice these skills that academic classes often lack time to offer.

BALLROOM DANCE AT PVCC

The benefits presented in these studies cover a range of health, cognitive, and social issues, and they show that participants young and old view ballroom dance as an enjoyable activity to both keep in good health or increase physical fitness. Yet, the question that still remains is the following: how do our students here at the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) benefit from a class in ballroom dance? Through an informal survey, students at PVCC were asked open-ended questions such as, "What were you thoughts prior to class (what it would be like, why you took it etc...), and what were your thoughts after or during the class? Did they change or stay the same? Why?" Students responded anonymously via email after grades had been completed. The comments were then separated from any identifying information such as email address and are provided in Table 1. Eight out of 14 students responded; 6 were male and 2 were female. The age range was 15 – mid-60s.

Three recurring themes appear in the students' responses: 1) They were initially afraid to take the class due to their lack of exposure in dance; 2) they enjoyed their experience more than they anticipated; and 3) they planned to continue dancing in the future. The first comment is a consistent theme in most ballroom classes. Students with no dance experience are often too unsure of themselves to try higher levels of dance such as ballet and modern. Social dance, while still intimidating, is the frequent starting point. In the students' words, they had "literally no previous dance experience"; "it was the most appealing PE credit"; and "if I really hated it, I was going to drop it." The latter two results from the questionnaire closely align with the previously mentioned scientific studies. Participants enjoy and plan to continue dancing as a form of physical exercise: "I found myself enjoying it tremendously," and "ballroom dance is now a skill that I want to develop, which was not something I expected." In a sense, providing ballroom dance classes to our students opens them to new experiences and promotes their future health by providing a lifelong skill.

A secondary notable theme was that dancing employed different cognitive processes than those used in the academic classes. While the students may not have understood the technical detail, they intuitively knew that they were being cognitively challenged. Students shared descriptions such as "it used a completely different part of my brain"; "I felt that both physically and educationally I was challenged early and often"; and "I really enjoyed the expression and creativity that was available during every step."

Lastly, students report benefiting socially and emotionally from participating in ballroom class. While not specifically stated, almost all of their comments start from a mindset of negativity and turn to a positive sense of pride and confidence: "My friends pressured me into it"; "[Now] I can confidently dance." This last comment reflects the atmosphere of the class which is built on respect, encouragement, and an enthusiastic round of high-fives. From this positive mindset springs greater creativity and broader thinking (Fredrickson, 2004) which heightens problem-solving abilities that students carry with them to other classes.

Additionally, recreational dancers often form communities of social support and informal learning. At PVCC, select students have initiated practice sessions through the week to work through figures learned in class. These students volunteer hours of their time to mentor the beginning students and to learn from each other. Other students have sought out opportunities to perform, compete and dance socially in the community. Their participation helps them gain peer-peer social skills as well as cross-generational skills. In the words of one student, "It allowed me to become comfortable in a social environment that I was really not used to."

As educators our responsibility is to provide opportunities for a well-rounded education. By providing dance classes we allow students the opportunity to be exposed to dance and soften their fears of participation. As ballroom instructors we open them up to a social activity that brings them both pleasure and a life-long source of exercise.

Clearly, the benefits of ballroom dance are many. The question of whether dance will once again become a priority to the education curriculum is still to be determined. PVCC is unique in that it provides one of the few associate degrees in dance offered in the nation. There are currently two levels of ballroom at PVCC and many classes of Ballroom I are offered throughout VCCS. Therefore, despite the struggle for prominence, our students at VCCS do have the opportunity to enroll in dance. Our challenge is to encourage them to participate in the many benefits of dance so that, as the students say, they will leave "wishing [they] had done it sooner."

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Table 1
STUDENT RESPONSES

Before the class I really had no expectations of it. I knew that I had no rhythm so I didn't expect to exactly tear things up, but other than that I really had no idea what to expect. At the beginning of the class I struggled. I had trouble getting my body to do what I wanted it to do, which was frustrating…. Despite those struggles, I found myself enjoying dancing more than I expected…By the end of the semester I found myself enjoying it tremendously. It was the last class of my day and it used a completely different part of my brain. I found it almost relaxing to turn off the logical part of my brain and just try and make my feet move the way I wanted. Now that the class has concluded I am wishing I had done it sooner. (male)	Going into the class, I truly had no idea what to expect both in terms of what I was going to learn and what my experiences would be learning to dance for the first time. I felt that both physically and educationally I was challenged early and often, but as with any challenge the more work I put into it the more reward I took out of it. After the first few classes, I started to get a feel for the basic techniques and the movement of the body in general. I really enjoyed the expression and creativity that was available during every step. Now that the semester is over, I can fully appreciate how much I learned in this class. I can confidently dance to many popular ballroom dances and have the tools that I need to adapt and learn new moves and techniques. Starting the semester with literally no previous dance experience, I am thrilled with what this class has offered me this semester! (male)
I was really nervous about the class. I thought I'd just suck it up and take it to learn a skill. If I really hated it, I was going to drop it. Slow. Uncomfortable. I hoped it'd be good, but I didn't expect much. I didn't expect it to be my favorite class of the semester! ... I learned a ton; the people were fun…. Having Larry (Moulis, our TA) there really helped in so many ways…I am continuing to take ballroom classes. I want to keep getting better. (male)	I heard that it was a good time and that you learned a lot. I took it because my friends pressured me into it and I needed a gym credit....During the class my actual desire to become a better ballroom dancer increased, where at first it wasn't as important to me. Now after the class I want to continue learning new dances and improving upon the ones that I know. (male)

I always heard people talking about how ballroom dancing was hard but it didn't seem all that hard to me before I took the class. But as we got into some more complicated stuff during the semester I really began to appreciate it. Dancing can be challenging! One thing that kind of struck me as interesting was the steps. Having seen ballroom dancing in movies or at a dance they look so different and cool. But as we were learning the steps it has been really neat to find similarities between all the dances. Also seeing how different styles play into that. For example Jive vs. East Coast Swing... they are the same basic steps but different style. I don't really know... I guess it has just been cool to learn a variety of dances and seeing how they connect in different ways! (male)	Dance was never very interesting to me and I initially took this class just because it was the most appealing PE credit, but I actually really enjoyed the class. I learned more than I thought I would and I hope to continue dancing. (female)
I took Ballroom Dance for two reasons: 1)I needed a physical activity that would provide enough hours a week to satisfy a high school P.E. …2) It looked interesting! Not being inclined towards the world of sports, or competition in general, the course seemed like something that would fit me. I had also watched many old movies since I was little, so dancing was already a skill that I admired and valued. (female)	…Class was fun, engaging and challenging without being intimidating. I appreciated the casual environment because it allowed me to become comfortable in a social environment that I was really not used to. I won't pretend that certain aspects weren't stressful, the exams and social dances were intimidating. But they were ultimately rewarding, … Ballroom Dance is now a skill that I want to develop, which was not something I expected. (male)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carrie Pledger is Adjunct Instructor of Dance at Piedmont Virginia Community College, located in Charlottesville, Virginia. She holds a master's degree in biology from the University of Virginia and a master's degree in teaching from the American University. She has worked in research for the National Institutes of Mental Health and for UVA Neurosurgery, and taught at both the secondary and college level.