

EXPRESSIONS THROUGH MOVEMENT AND DANCE:
EXPLORING THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON THE
WELL-BEING OF YOUNG REFUGEE CHILDREN

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A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2020

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College of Education

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Abstract

Expressions Through Movement and Dance:

Exploring the Mind-Body Connection and its Implications on the Well-being of Young Refugee Children

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Refugee children exposed to extreme violence, terrorism and war, and the resulting loss and grief are likely to be traumatized. These children might struggle with somatic problems, sleep disturbances, social withdrawal, depression, high levels of anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), aggression, and other behavioral concerns. Trauma affects children's mind and body, leading to complex symptoms affecting their memory and making it difficult for them to articulate their traumatic experiences and emotions. Refugee children belong to varied socioeconomic, racial and ethnic groups and their migration process is further complicated by stress inducing factors such as culture shock, health and financial issues, changes in their family

roles and structure. Faced with threats to their physical, emotional and psychological well-being, the ecological factors surrounding refugee children, such as, family, peers, communities, and institutions, are critical to their resilience and well-being.

This dissertation is a study of the emotional experiences of young refugee children. The study is designed using a child-directed, qualitative method that includes video recorded semi-structured movement and dance sessions, interviews, and observations in a community setting. It explored children's personal stories through movement and dance, working collaboratively in a shared space. Through narratives embedded in movement and dance, the study provided a platform for the children to connect with their peers and to express themselves.

The study makes contributions to our understanding of the linkage between the body and the mind for refugee children with traumatic life experiences. Firstly, the freedom to take ownership of their activities can allow for the revival of spontaneity in refugee children who experience a numbing of their emotions due to their exposure to traumatic events. Secondly, the freedom to explore movement without the expectation of strict adherence to preset activities, can encourage young refugee children to develop a sense of agency. Thirdly, the extemporaneous quality of free-flowing movement can contribute to a wider range of facial expressions, gestures, postures and expansive body movements. This expansion of the movement repertoire in refugee children can reconnect them to their physical and emotional selves through heightened body awareness. Fourthly, the simplicity and flexibility of the movement and dance sessions based in the community, supported by the parents and informally guided by the children, allowed the growth of mutual trust and respect. The exposure to an intersubjective experience using alternative modes of expression had a positive influence on the children's emotional self-regulation, self-awareness, self-esteem and strengthened their communicative skills. In this

study, the author introduces a new term called the '*synergistic loop*' to recognize the interactive nature of self-expressions through dance, movement, and other modes of creative exploration. Narratives of childhood trauma shared by the children through movement, dance and pictorial depiction were indicative of this interactive and integrative system of body, mind, and emotion.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been honored to know and grow in the company of a few brilliant minds who inspire me. Prof. Brinda Jegatheesan, whose generosity and kindness are inspirational. You have been my *Guru* in the truest sense of the word, guiding me at every step and teaching by example. And in challenging times, you have been a confidante, giving me unwavering support. I am filled with so much gratitude for you. Gerry, I am thankful for the support and encouragement you have shown. Joor, thank you for your kindness. To Abhishek, although our journey together has come to an end, we continue to travel, to grow and to care for each other. To Amlan, you are the blessing I always count on.

To Munna, Swati, Kuki and Rympu, for the collective eccentricity that we conjure out of thin air, thank you for your endearing and refreshing friendship. To Shrads, my gentle, kind and sincerest friend, I am so grateful to have you. Jazzy, remembering your jubilant smile and the light you shared. To Peter, for the life we have, for the joy and the laughter, thank you.

DEDICATION

To my parents, my late brother Sanchayan, and my four-legged angels Tuki, Frodo and Butter.

And to all the blooming children in this dissertation research, till we dance together again.

Fire Blossoms

Moving shadows

On a sun-dipped chaise

Fingers on the flute, inking thoughts

Just us?

Yes

but

all of us

the fire, the love, the glory

for shadows dance, for shadows burn bright

And dancing shadows become light.

Voyages

The Spaces we Create, the Stories we Tell

Long narrow flutes of stairways

I play my song with footsteps

An infant half asleep on her back with her belly moving up and down, keeping beat to the music floating around the house from an old vinyl record player. This happens to be one of the earliest memories my parents have of me exploring the natural rhythm of the body. A few years later, I was enrolled in an Indian classical dance school, where I attended weekly lessons in *Bharatanatyam*¹ for the next eight years.

In the ensuing years, I found that dance naturally captured my happy spirit as a young child. Although I had exposure to different languages growing up in a multilingual family, dance became my language of spontaneity and joyful expression. However, as traumatic personal life events revealed early on in my childhood, dance extended beyond expressions of joy to those of emotional release for me and subsequent healing, growth, and well-being.

Tracing my journey from childhood till now, I see how at every corner, at every intersection in which my life took an unexpected turn, I had dance as my safety zone, my sacred shrine, my only stable ground to make sense of it all. It is no wonder then that I have never stopped dancing.

Driven by my curiosity about the patterns and techniques that different dance forms have to offer, I ventured into salsa, ballet, belly dance, zouk, and hip hop, over the years. However, although training in different dance forms has expanded my movement repertoire, I have come to

¹ A form of classical Indian dance from the southern state of Tamil Nadu. The name is derived from Sanskrit words, namely, Bha from *Bhava* meaning emotion, Ra from *Raaga* meaning melody, Ta from *Taala* meaning rhythm, and *Natyam* which means dance (Ramesh, 2018).

realize that the most valuable learning to me has been understanding that movement is instinctual and deeply personal.

When I dance, I am in a space that is not defined by any one specific dance form but rather an indefinite space that is fluid and follows my changing life experiences. In each of my journeys, across space, across time, dance has been and continues to be a timeless and formless place that I carry with me wherever I go. It is where everything that is home to me breathes and lives. It is my home.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Dewey (1934) wrote, “life goes on in an environment; not merely in it but because of it, through interaction with it...its subcutaneous organs are means of connection with what lies beyond its bodily frame” (p.13). Creative avenues for self-expression have always been my closest ally, my most reliable and constant companion. Since childhood, I have found it much easier to ‘talk’ through hours of scribbling, through free-flowing movement around the house and on the playground, and gradually through the tunes of poetry. The trajectory of my thoughts often resembles the squiggles themselves - random, full-blown, dense, repetitive, and perhaps timeless. I have noticed how there is always movement in my body, even when I am relatively still. My body seems to follow the ‘squiggles’ of my mind! And if there is more (as there always is) to talk about, I converse through pencil sketches and oil colors. As though, after everything has been said and expressed, the last vestiges, the residue of my emotions are captured one last time with a sweep of the brush or a stroke of the pencil, so I can take a deep breath and resume. To me, it never stops; it is forever in motion, this verb of expression.

These expressions map the topography of spaces in my life, physical and imaginary. Traversing this landscape within linear time seems limiting and nearly impossible unless the arts come to my rescue! Some voices call out from years ago, and sometimes a moment is anything but just that. To me, creative self-expression captures the element of timelessness in personal life stories, providing the ‘gear’ to hike, to climb, to fly over mindscapes. Every space I revisit connects me to myself, adding another piece to the jigsaw. I am aware though that the jigsaw is boundless; it never needs to be a whole picture as at every lived moment, it is complete in and of itself and continues to evolve, a living jigsaw!

Statement of the Problem and Rationale for the Study

I recognize the strength and solace that dance offered me throughout my childhood. In the past few years, as a graduate researcher, I often wondered what creative self-expression through movement and dance, could do for children with traumatic experiences. In young children, movement is an instinctual need. Perhaps, it is one of the most spontaneous, visceral elements of a child's life. It stands to reason then that something so deeply rooted, instinctual would be an arterial route for each child to connect to others and their evolving inner selves which are continually in a state of flux.

“Children tell their stories by using their bodies” wrote Ostroburski (p.156, 2009). Storytelling is an ancient art form, and while working with children with stressful or traumatic experiences, they can help distance the pain by making children aware that there are others with similar life experiences, and that they can work together to face their challenges (Malchiodi, 2015, 2020). Children narrate stories through talk, play, art, singing, dancing, writing, and so on, thus, helping them make meaning of the events in their lives. These narratives shared by children have underlying themes that contribute to their sense of identity, support their beliefs, as well as provide comfort in difficult times (Neimeyer, 2000).

The annual global trends study by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR, 2018) stated that there are an estimated 25.4 million refugees worldwide who have fled their countries to escape conflict and persecution. Of these 25.4 million refugees, 52% are children. When including the 16 million children living in internal displacement due to violence and conflict, the number increases to 28 million. In 2015, many of these refugee children belonged to war-torn countries in the Middle East, primarily Syria, Iraq and Yemen (Pew Research Center, 2016). Refugee children and their families face tremendous hardships,

abandoning their homes to escape violence and seeking safety in unfamiliar territories, which could be faraway. These families often experience a loss of their familiar social network and support (Pat-Horenczyk, 2014; Watters, 2014). For children, coping skills, such as, emotional regulation, the cognitive ability to comprehend the situation and the language to communicate feelings is integral to the development of their resilience. However, these integral skills are underdeveloped in young children and their emotional health and response to trauma is dependent on that of their caregivers (Salmon & Bryant, 2002; Scheeringa & Zeenah, 2001). Therefore, it is critical that therapeutic and intervention programs addressing the needs of children are designed with the whole family in perspective (Pat-Horenczyk, 2014; Rogoff, 2003). Further, there are many children with disabilities, trauma and other health related conditions in the United States who belong to linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds (Gopaul-McNicol & Thomas-Presswood, 1998; Herrera et al., 2007). It is essential to recognize the staggering diversity among the refugee population itself to avoid overemphasizing the commonalities within the children while designing interventions to address their psychosocial and emotional needs. In the United States, the mainstream therapeutic interventions follow a framework of Western attitudes, values and beliefs. For example, some of the common therapies for treating traumatic stress are cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), narrative exposure therapy (NET), cognitive processing therapy (CPT), eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) therapy (Ehlers, 2013; Schauer et al., 2011; Shapiro, 2007). However, many such intervention programs tend to be highly structured and controlled where ironically, the refugee families themselves have no say in programs designed to assist and empower them. As such, these families are faced with the need for culturally responsive practices that integrate their family and community values (Detlaff & Rowena, 2016). There is a strong need for a wider,

multicultural understanding of the socioemotional and psychological needs of the refugee population. Non-traditional methods, such as expressive art therapy, animal-assisted intervention, indigenous treatments, and so forth can prove to be valuable approaches.

Based on my understanding of this need for alternative programs, I began to consider designing a program for refugee children which would allow them to have agency and be active participants in their process of healing. I was motivated to create an organic, unstructured space for them where they would be free to express themselves. Perhaps there would be some value in such an exercise and with this idea in mind, I decided to venture into an exploration of movement and dance expressions with young refugee children. Further, my own deep therapeutic relationship with dance and movement motivated me to undertake this exploration in my dissertation research. I decided to explore movement and dance with refugee children in a community space, engaging their families at every step of the study. I reached out to the refugee population in the Pacific Northwest (PNW) through several non-profit organizations for refugees which led to the recruitment of eight Iraqi refugee children from four families. The families were very convivial towards me and welcomed me into their lives. I realized that I share many similarities with the families in socio-cultural practices and ways of life. Besides, being an immigrant myself, although voluntary unlike them, I am away from my homeland just as they are. We share similarities in interests as well, such as, a fondness for spicy food and love for *Bollywood* (the movie industry in India). I was able to build a relationship of mutual trust and respect with the families.

I designed weekly movement and dance sessions for the eight children in the study. Using digital recording, I filmed their free-flowing and unstructured movement and dance expressions. Keeping structure to a minimum, I, as the facilitator, provided the children a space

to experiment and play with movement and narrate their past and present experiences. Of the eight children in the study, two focal children, Waheeda and Shabana were studied for the analysis and interpretation of results. The findings demonstrate how through the creation of a collaborative space, the children shared their stories. And through this act of sharing, they found relatable experiences that contributed towards a collective healing process. The results are evidence for the irrefutable connection between our bodies and our history, feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Levy, 2005).

Literature Review

Throughout the literature review, I intend to provide the reader with a concise look at the theoretical underpinnings in the field of education, psychology and neuroscience that inform this dissertation.

Dewey (1934) advocated a progressive philosophy of education that focused on learning through active engagement and experiences that would contribute to children's well-being. The learning experiences in the school environment should be based upon and reflect the real world. The expanding scope of contemporary research on active learning in the cognitive sciences and brain research have propelled a resurgence of interest in the progressive philosophy of education (Dewey, 1934, 1997; Eisner, 1998; Minton & Faber, 2016). Studies in neuro-education examine how the neural networks are engaged in creative thinking and problem solving and how the arts can enrich children's cognitive development and learning (Hanna, 2008; Hannaford, 2005; Minton & Faber, 2016).

In progressive education, the belief in the importance of children's experiences through their bodies, rooted in developmental psychology, has been long prevalent (Dow, 2010; Gallas, 1994; Gilbert, 1992, 2002). Jean Piaget explained that children learn by acting upon the

environment and then understanding and integrating the observed effects of these actions into their structure of the world around them. These concrete actions, observations, and integration of schemes is self-initiated and self-directed and form the foundation of children's cognitive development, leading the way for abstract thinking (Ginsburg & Opper, 1969). The developmental-interaction approach to education goes beyond Piaget's central focus on physical activity for cognitive development. It recognizes the significance of the interaction between physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development and the active engagement of children in these interactions (Biber & Franklin, 1967; Franklin & Biber, 1974). Children have a unique rhythm, and the freedom for young children to move as they wish positively influences their learning because they can engage in problem-solving through their persistence in learning to move their body (H'Doubler, 1940). For instance, when an infant focuses intently on the movement of the fingers, hands, wrists, and arms, and visually traces these movements, a link is established between the experience of moving and the experience of looking. When children learn the ways to move as well as learn how to do things, they experience joy and satisfaction, knowing that the learning is their own. Such early explorations of movement act as a source of kinesthetic knowing for the young child (H'Doubler, 1940; Joyce, 1994; Stinson, 1988, 1993).

Research in neuroscience specifies that brain plasticity is higher in the early years of life (Diamond & Hopson, 1999; Hanna, 2014). This highlights the importance of enriching environments for young children that can facilitate their interpersonal skills, emotional regulation and cognitive development. Studies indicate that there is neural growth due to bodily action, leading to higher neural activity (Berninger & Richards, 2002; Hannaford, 2005). The complex electromagnetic, chemical, and physical processes that happen simultaneously throughout the brain form the foundation of our thinking and bodily movement. Further, our thoughts and the

messages embedded in them are conveyed by neural connections throughout the body, which help to transmit the bodily nature of thought and mind. Bodily action through movement requires energy and creates energy, thus stimulating the brain through change (Minton & Faber, 2016). Klorer (2008), observes that sensory based interventions for childhood trauma, such as, therapeutic programs based on movement, dance, art, play, and so forth are right-brain dominant. Trauma leads to decreased functioning in Broca's area, the brain's language processing area in the left hemisphere, making it difficult for children to express themselves through language (Diamond & Hopson, 1999; Rothschild, 2000; van der Kolk, 2003). Engaging in expressions through movement, dance and other arts can be therapeutic for children with trauma, as it allows them to portray their feelings, provides them a way to address emotional conflicts, heightens their self-awareness, expands their social skills and fosters their coping mechanisms, thus, increasing their self-esteem (Malchiodi, 2006; Ugurlu et al., 2016). Thus, sensory-based approaches to therapeutic interventions can support the integration of the right and left brain to ameliorate the effects of childhood trauma (Teicher, 2000). Further, expressions through the arts have been found to be beneficial in alleviating anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and contributing to the psychological well-being of children (Ugurlu et al., 2016).

Mind-Body Connection

Research in the brain sciences investigates the interrelationship of the mind and body, exploring how movement skills impact and are influenced by cognitive and emotional processes (Berninger, 2000; Bläsing et al., 2010; Hanna, 2014). Neuroscientists have discovered mirror neurons in the premotor cortex and other brain areas that could be the neuronal substrate of the human ability to sense what others are feeling, to imitate others, and to be able to empathize with them (Hannaford, 2005). Children's early experiences form the basis of their affective history

with emotional, cognitive as well as social challenges. They begin to understand and make connections between their physical, bodily expressions, and abstract ideas of emotion. Children's ability to recognize facial expressions is critical as it helps them to understand that there are similarities between their self and the other, thus nurturing social cognition. With increased exposure, their emotional vocabulary expands such that they are well equipped for bodily expressions, or movement to express emotion (Hanna, 2008, 2014; Hannaford, 2005; Minton & Faber, 2016; Thom, 2010). Children learn how some of their emotional experiences can be unique and some shared by their peers, allowing them to reassess their emotions and recognize the multiplicity of feelings and temperaments in others (Adolphs, 2006). Children should have the opportunity to move freely, following their instinctual need for movement, which would allow them to attend to their bodily cues, thus enhancing somatic awareness (Frostig, 1970; Gilbert, 1992; Grineski, 1993).

Neuroscience research shows how the physical body's experiences are interwoven with cognition and emotion (Damasio, 1994; LeDoux, 1996; Stern, 2009; Sternberg, 2001; Thom, 2010; Winters et al., 2008). As a vital part of movement and emotional expression, the body can be a powerful means of representation of emotions and connect conscious emotional appraisal to its autonomic parts (Boone & Cunningham, 1998). The body and the brain function as partners in all stages of growth, which further illuminates the need to foster self-expression through movement in the early years of life (Damasio, 1999).

Movement and Dance for Children

Movement is the raw material out of which dance is created, much like music is made from sound. For example, movements that usually travel through space such as walking, running, or movements that most often stay in one place such as shaking, bending, hopping, and so on can

be woven together to create a dance sequence (Stinson, 1993). Dance is a form of stylized movement consisting of vocabulary (locomotion and gestures), grammar or syntax (rules in different languages and dance traditions), and semantics (meanings). While verbal language weaves together sequences of words, dance weaves sequences of movement to make phrases and sentences. Children absorb and understand the world around them through their senses, their bodily experiences and their emotions, even before they learn to use words. The language of the senses, which is the first language that children learn, embraces their earliest experiences, providing a path to recovery and healing for children with trauma (Malchiodi, 2020).

Movement and dance can mediate stress through raising body awareness in children, which can contribute to their developing social cognition and emotional development (Frith & Frith, 2007). As a fundamental mode of expression, dance has the potential to communicate ideas and emotions that are deep, timeless, and universal. It can open boundless interpretative opportunities, and this ambiguity of meaning is one of the main ways in which dance can prove to be an influential medium of communication. It can foster healthy development in a wide variety of domains, including self-image, self-body awareness, and self-esteem (Hanna, 1988; Joyce, 1994; Karff, 1969; Stinson, 1993), tolerance and respect for diverse others (Gilbert, 1992; Stinson, 1988), decision making, taking responsibility, making adjustments and adaptations and testing alternatives (Block, 1977; Fleming, 1976; Lobo & Winsler, 2006). Although physical activity such as sports have similar benefits, dance is unique in that it challenges children to look within and have a personal focus. Dance challenges them to express their emotions and their imagination through meaningful movement and thereby promotes psychological well-being (Burns & Faber, 2005; Thom, 2010) since the body is directly associated to emotional health

(Levy et al., 2006). Following is a discussion of the importance of dance and movement in the domains of children's social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Social Development. Dance and its constituent movements convey ideas, feelings, stories, using various parts of the body and requires learning movement sequences, and meaningful interpretation. Children learn to adjust their movements depending on whether they are moving individually or with a partner or a group which fosters cooperation naturally (Bloch, 1977; Gilbert, 1992; Stinson, 1988). Given the opportunity to work together toward a common goal, such as creating a shape, or gathering around the one available seat in a game of musical chairs, children understand that each of them contribute to the attainment of the goal. Cooperation promotes prosocial behaviors and self-esteem. Through cooperative learning, motivation, and feelings of belongingness can be enhanced (Frostig, 1970; Grineski, 1993; Pica, 1997).

Movement and dance can enhance children's nonverbal expression of feelings leading to increased cognitive and kinesthetic awareness and communication skills, and these qualities are the building blocks for social competence (Pica, 1997). Further, dance can foster kinesthetic empathy, which is a form of knowledge and shared meaning-making either through mirroring or attunement to the movements of others using analogy, metaphor, and personal narratives (Chaiklin & Wengrower, 2009).

Emotional Development. According to James (1884), there can be no emotion without a body, and it would be nearly implausible to conceptualize emotion without the instinctive responses that are connected to our conscious emotional states (Palencik, 2007). Children's ideas, feelings, and sensory impressions are expressed symbolically through movement forms using their body as the instrument (Dimondstein, 1971). Movement and dance have the potential

to foster development of skills for coping with emotional and cognitive challenges (Gilbert, 1992), emotional expression and understanding (Fleming, 1976; Karff, 1969), tension relief and emotional release (Karff, 1969), and self-control (Jay, 1991; Lobo & Winsler, 2006; Stinson, 1988).

By celebrating spontaneity, originality and individuality, movement and dance honor individual experience and allow children to learn about their strengths and weaknesses. Children can explore new physical, social, and emotional territories through movement and dance (Joyce, 1994). When children can share their emotions with others and their symbolic representations of the world, it facilitates the development of social cognition (Frith & Frith, 2007).

Cognitive Development. In his theory of the cognitive development of children, Piaget (1963, 1952) explained the development of symbolic thought as children go through sequential stages in their thinking. With symbolic thought comes an abstract understanding of the world in which children recognize that other people can have views that are different from their own. The capacity for symbolic thought is demonstrated in children's pretend play where they practice assimilating their experiences, by engaging in sensorimotor activities (Minton & Faber, 2006). Piaget pioneered the recognition that sensorimotor activity fosters cognitive abilities, and the human brain has specialized regions to detect different patterns of motion. Physical activity makes neurons agile so that they wire into the neural network. Dance and movement promote neurogenesis, the making of new cells and their connections, which promotes the release of the protein neurotrophic factor in the brain supporting learning and memory functions. Brain growth leads to dynamic interaction with the mind as it manipulates symbols that represent the world around us (Caf et al., 1997; Hanna, 2014; Hannaford, 2005; Minton & Faber, 2016).

Thinking takes place with our brains in collaboration with our bodies as thought processes are, in part, based on physical experiences of the body, many of which are culturally constructed (Berk, 2009; Rogoff, 2003). Children construct and experience reality based on their neuropsychological predisposition, the context they are in, and their learning (Dolan, 2002; Hannaford, 2005; Tronick, 2007). Movement stimulates learning physiologically, as well as helps children experience concepts that are processed cognitively. As motor development and cognitive development are fundamentally interrelated, when cognitive development is disturbed, motor development is often adversely affected (Diamond & Hopson, 1999). Movement and dance can provide concrete experiences through which children can become more aware of their world (Stinson, 1993). In Jegatheesan et al. (2017), an eight-year-old First Nations child named Dario Tumuhw with communicative and mobility difficulties began to show improvement after his grandmother incorporated traditional singing and dancing to improve his gross motor coordination and communication. Concrete and natural experiences and activities situated in the familiar context of the child (e.g., moving to the range of musical beats of traditional powwow songs which included syllable sounds such as “hey, yah or lay”) aided in the child’s communication.

Children with Trauma

Children who experience abuse and neglect, or are exposed to natural disasters, extreme violence, terrorism and war, and the resulting loss and grief are likely to be traumatized. A child can experience a single occurrence of a traumatic event or multiple occurrences which can be traumatizing taken in their entirety. Traumatic experiences have significant emotional, psychosocial and somatic impact on children. Trauma affects children’s mind and body and can lead to complex symptoms affecting their memory and social interactions (Malchiodi, 2020;

Ogden et al., 2006; Pat-Horenczyk, 2014). Research shows that childhood trauma can disrupt children's normal brain development and impact their regulative abilities. For instance, there can be problems in emotional regulation (e.g., anger) and regulation of physiological arousal (e.g., hyperarousal). The displacement and insecurity intrinsic to refugee situations can harm children's physical, psychological, and social development, making it difficult for them to trust and relate to others (Foa et al., 2009; James, 1994; Perry, 2006).

Children who suffer the loss of loved ones under precipitous, horrifying circumstances, can develop complex traumatic grief (Epstein, 2013). In complex traumatic grief there is long-term exposure to several distressing events (National Child Traumatic Stress Network [NCTSN], 2014). PTSD can be a consequence of such extended and multiple exposure to traumatic events. The American Psychiatric Association (2000) defines PTSD as the effect of a traumatic event or succession of traumatic events characterized by disturbing memories of the trauma and symptoms of avoidance and hyperarousal. PTSD can co-occur with depression and/or anxiety disorders and research suggests a link between the extreme and chronic experience of trauma among refugees and a diagnosis of PTSD (Campbell-Sills et al., 2006; Fazel et al., 2005; Feldner et al., 2006).

Trauma, Memory and Resilience. There are two types of memory, namely, explicit or declarative and implicit memory. Our conscious memories, composed of facts, ideas and concepts is called explicit or declarative memory. Explicit memory provides access to language allowing us to describe our thoughts and feelings. On the other hand, implicit memory is the sensory storehouse of emotional elements and is connected to our body's learned memories. In implicit memory, our senses are our memory, where sight, sound, smell, taste and touch, contain our memories related to any event. Through nonverbal expression, it is possible to connect to

implicit memories, the sensory storehouses of our experiences and emotions (Malchiodi, 2008). The sensory-based storage of trauma memories suggests that right-brain dominant therapeutic approaches, such as art, music, dance, and so forth can support restoration of well-being (Siegel, 2012; Rothschild, 2000; van der Kolk, 1994).

Children who can regulate their emotions, can reduce their arousal levels through an internal process of regulating conscious and unconscious emotions and some children are likely to have a higher capacity to deal with hardship than others (Diamond & Aspinwall, 2003; Moore, 2013). In the therapeutic literature, there is a growing emphasis for a new strength-based model that recognizes the resilience of refugee children rather than focusing on pathology (Muecke, 1992). Resilience, in the psychology literature, is defined as, “a dynamic developmental process reflecting evidence of positive adaptation despite significant life adversity” (Cicchetti, 2003, p. 20). However, resilience is not a constant and every child can have limits to their ability to absorb stress and face adversity without being overwhelmed. Despite major upheavals and stressors and the resulting impact on neurological development, research in psychology and biology suggest that childhood trauma can be positively altered. Studies indicate that therapeutic interventions can change neuronal connections through brain plasticity. Literature on refugee children’s resilience emphasizes the ecological factors surrounding children, such as, family, peers, communities, and institutions, all of which are critical in supporting their well-being (Pat-Horenczyk, 2014; Perry, 2006).

The Refugee Population

The United Nations (1967) identifies a refugee as a person seeking asylum who has a “well-founded fear of persecution by reason of his race, religion, and nationality” and, as a result

of such fear, is unwilling to avail of the protection of the government of the country of one's nationality (Watters, 2014, p. 3146).

Refugees represent a diverse population who share the common experience of having fled their native countries due to the fear of persecution based on their social status, their identity or political or religious beliefs. The highest number of refugees are from developing countries such as Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Myanmar, Somalia, Sudan, and Syria. There are refugees in the United States from Cambodia, Ethiopia, Haiti, Iraq, and Vietnam as well (UNHCR, 2015). Over the past few years, there has been a steady rise in the number of refugees worldwide, due to the escalating and sustained conflict in the Middle East, particularly Syria (Lynch & Brand, 2017). The invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Civil war that followed in 2014, led to an estimated 6 million refugees and millions of others who were internally displaced. While many have escaped the wars in Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen, the biggest share of refugees from the Middle East are due to the wars in Iraq and Syria (Lynch & Brand, 2017; UNHCR, 2018). It is to be noted that over half (52%) of refugees are children (UNHCR, 2018) and it is critical that their academic, behavioral, and socioemotional needs are addressed understanding that many of these children experience recurrent trauma, such as intergenerational trauma (Baker & Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 1999) which can influence their post migration experiences as well (Frater-Mathieson, 2003; George, 2012; UNHCR, 2018). Refugees often feel a sense of loss, isolation, depression, anxiety, and overall disillusionment which leads to substantial cumulative trauma (George, 2012; Kirmayer et al., 2011). Exposure to such severe hardships can multiply their stress levels and research has shown that refugees in the United States tend to have higher rates of psychopathology, such as anxiety, PTSD, depression, dissociation, amongst other conditions,

when compared with the general population (Frater-Mathieson, 2003; George, 2012; Kirmayer et al., 2011).

Refugee Children

The UNHCR (2012) estimates a total of 33.9 million people “of concern” to the agency, which includes refugees, asylum seekers, repatriated refugees, internally displaced persons, and stateless persons. Worldwide there are millions of children who are coping with the aftermath of war, persecution, or environmental catastrophes. The conditions under which refugee children leave their homes and seek shelter elsewhere can vary considerably. In some cases, they may have no resources and face immediate danger, and are forced to run to a safe location nearby. If the danger is unrelenting and pervasive, they may embark on long hazardous journeys into neighboring territories or faraway countries. Oftentimes, they have no choice but to leave suddenly without much time for any preparation for the journey ahead to safety. As such, refugee children encounter far more challenges compared to other children with normal lives (Watters, 2014). They are faced with threats to their physical and psychological well-being. The journey during migration is mired with ambiguities and marked by danger (George, 2012). Refugees may travel several countries and in the interim time between leaving their own country and reaching their final country of refuge, are placed in refugee camps. The conditions in these camps are not always ideal and can be lacking in basic necessities, such as clean drinking water, food, medical care, and so on as well as characterized by violence (George, 2012). Refugee children face the disruption of the family and community structures due to the sudden and sometimes violent nature of the emergencies in which they are engulfed. With the breakdown of societal mechanisms, their families face considerable distress torn away from the familiar social, economic and cultural environment. In terms of their personal experiences some refugee children

may have witnessed the torture, murder or abuse of relatives and friends. They could be living in constant fear while their parents or caregivers could be battling severe distress, trauma and anxiety (George, 2012; McBrien, 2005). The severe distress faced by adult caregivers within families could lead to child neglect, abandonment, and disintegration of the family itself. For children's physical, psychological, and social development, it is imperative that their family provides them with a sense of stability and security through the care they receive (McBrien, 2005). Therefore, providing support to their families and communities is critical to meet their physical and socioemotional needs (Nickerson et al., 2011).

Risk Factors for Refugee Children. The experience of moving to a new country and adapting to the new culture and everyday life is a stressful process that combines social, economic, cultural, linguistic, and environmental factors. Particularly among the refugee population, the migration process is complicated by experiences of emotional pain, loss and possible trauma as well as a plethora of stress inducing factors such as culture shock, health and financial issues, unemployment, changes in their family roles and structure, amongst others (Frater-Mathieson, 2003). Research shows that refugee children are at higher risk for psychological problems owing to the hardships prevalent in each stage of the migration process (George, 2012; Frater-Mathieson, 2003). They are likely to have somatic problems, social withdrawal, problems with social relations, attention problems as well as depression, high levels of anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), aggression and other behavioral concerns (Ugurlu et al., 2016).

For practitioners and educators working with refugee children, it is imperative to recognize that these children belong to varied socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic groups as well as have unique migration experiences. Given the increasing diversity of the refugee population, the

workforce serving this complex population is not well-equipped to support their psychological well-being and socioemotional needs (Frater-Mathieson, 2003). Therefore, research addressing the nuances of their diverse cultural backgrounds and identifying metrics for tailoring supportive programs and interventions is necessary. Better understanding of sensory-based therapeutic approaches to address trauma in refugee children, in culturally responsive ways would be a move in the right direction.

Well-being of Refugee Children. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children supports an ecological perspective on children’s well-being by recognizing children’s development within a holistic context. The Convention commits to the well-being of children by promoting “the physical, psychological, social, emotional, cognitive and cultural development of children” (United Nations, 2002; United Nations Children’s Fund [UNICEF], 2008). For children’s holistic development and well-being, healthy relationships with parents, siblings, peers and the community are important. The environmental context in which children are embedded plays a key role in their socioemotional well-being. Contextual development theories such as Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory emphasizes children’s interactions with their physical and social environment. The individual and the sociocultural factors, including family, peers, and education have dynamic reciprocal relationships. Vygotsky’s views on children’s development are supported by research in non-Western societies (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). The cognitive development of children is context specific and is a process emanating from interactions between the child and the environment. The zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) recognizes the importance of *scaffolding* or support from others, such as, peers, parents and teachers. It highlights the difference between what children can achieve on their own and what they can achieve when affirmed and guided by others. Scaffolding can help

to develop and strengthen children's abilities. Additionally, interactions and relationships with peers can have implications for children's socioemotional and physical development (Bakhurst, 2007; Lewis, 2007). Positive peer relationships can enable development of social skills, prosocial behaviors, perspective taking, sharing, cooperating and emotional regulation (Davies, 1990; Mossler et al. 1976).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory is another case in point, highlighting the importance of context in children's development. It provides an ecological perspective on children's well-being (Rohner et al., 2005). The child, at the heart of the social ecology, is a developing organism with neurological, biological, and psychological systems embedded within a sociocultural, economic and political context. There are four interrelated systems which influence children's development, directly and indirectly. These contextual levels are the microsystem (e.g., family, school), the mesosystem (relationships between people in the microsystem, the ecosystem (e.g., healthcare settings, workplace) and the macrosystem (e.g., cultural norms, societal values and beliefs, social policies). These ecological systems and children acclimatize and respond to changes over time (historical events such as war, natural disasters, amongst others). Children play an active role in the environmental systems they are surrounded in. They influence and are influenced by the actions of others within these interconnected and overlapping systems, creating meaning out of their experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Pat-Horenczyk, 2014).

Finally, the Polyvagal theory by Porges (2011), emphasizes the importance of a safe environment and human connection in the developmental process. The theory is based on the evolution of the mammalian nervous system and how it influences behavior. It describes how the capacity for social engagement emerges as an adaptive behavior in mammals through the

development of the vagus nerve (dorsal and ventral). The vagus nerve is a neuronal pathway that supports our interpersonal skills and consists of neural circuits involved in eye movements, facial expressions, vocalizations, as well as the connection between the heart and brain. The Polyvagal theory states that social engagement is dependent on features, such as, facial expressivity, mood, gaze, posture during interaction, prosody, and regulation of emotional state, and so forth.

Children rely on these primary nonverbal cues in their relationships to ascertain the safety of their environment. Therefore, it is through our biology rather than language that safety is communicated. The neuronal circuits involved in the social nervous system are the same as those that mediate health and well-being. From a somatic perspective, the Polyvagal theory supports the potential of body-based therapeutic approaches in reconsolidation of trauma memories (Panksepp & Biven, 2012). Given that movement and dance naturally incorporate the components of social engagement, such as facial expressivity, listening, vocalizations, gestures, it can access the neuronal basis of human behavior directly (Levine et al., 2015; Porges, 2011).

The review of literature shows the uniquely challenging experiences of refugee children. Oftentimes, it can be difficult for refugee children to articulate their traumatic experiences and emotions. As the culturally diverse refugee population continues to grow, it is imperative that research explores the potential of alternative modes of expression to support the optimal development and well-being of refugee children. Since ancient times, the arts have allowed people to process pain, suffering, celebration, remembrance and healing. There is a complex and indisputable connection between our histories, behaviors, thoughts, feelings, and our bodies (Levy, 2005). Sensory-based approaches such as movement and dance can provide a pathway to promote neuroplasticity and thus, promote coping skills, healing and well-being (Perry, 2014).

My study examined alternative approaches working with refugee children with lived experiences of trauma. The following research questions guided the study:

1. In what ways can expressions through movement and dance support the emotional needs of young refugee children?
2. In what ways can expressions through movement and dance influence the social interactions of young refugee children?
3. In what ways can expressions through movement and dance support the well-being of young refugee children?

Outline of this Dissertation

Chapter II describes the paradigm that guided the research design and the methods of inquiry used for the data collection and analysis. Chapters III and IV present the portrait of the two focal children, Waheeda and Shabana and the findings pertinent to them. Chapter V is a discussion of the research findings, limitations and implications for future research, followed by the contributions of the study.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This dissertation is a qualitative study with eight Iraqi refugee children in a suburb in the Pacific Northwest (PNW), in which I collected the primary data through digital motion recording using two video cameras. I captured their spontaneous movements and interactions with each other over ten sessions, conducted in two and a half months. I wanted to explore and gain a deeper understanding of a relatively new phenomenon, in a novel social context, with a specific population. Thus, the qualitative approach was appropriate as the method of inquiry as it is focused on attaining a deep understanding of the social or human phenomenon being studied. Qualitative research is a naturalistic approach, that is, it examines the world in its natural settings and interprets occurrences based on the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It comprises of interpretive practices which provides representations of the world and is based on the premise that the world can be known only through its representations as reality can never be captured objectively. Further, the qualitative approach was suitable for this study because qualitative research is fundamentally multimethod. It allows the researcher to employ multiple methods for data collection, such as, interviews, surveys, observation, audio and video recording, artifacts, amongst others. By using multiple methods or triangulation, it adds breadth, depth and complexity to the research investigation (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Flick, 2002).

Participants

Access and Recruitment

To recruit participants for the study, I began by creating a list of non-profit organizations for the welfare of refugee children and families in the Pacific Northwest (PNW). I reached out to each of these organizations via both phone and email. If my call was answered, I introduced myself and provided a short description of my study goals to the staff members who spoke with me. If the phone call went to voicemail, I left a message with my study details and contact information. Then, I emailed each of these organizations with a self-introduction, details of the study and the study flyer (See Appendix A for Call for Participation), requesting them to respond to me either through email or by phone at their earliest convenience. In addition to contacting non-profit organizations directly, I posted color copies of the flyer, with prior permission from the requisite authorities, at different locations within the University of Washington campus. I followed up with a second and a third round of phone calls from organizations from whom I had received no response in over two weeks. By the end of three weeks, I heard back from three organizations, two of which offered to post the flyer in their office. The third organization reached out to me through email asking for more information and I scheduled a phone call to discuss the same. The person I spoke with, Naseer, belonged to the Iraqi community in the PNW. He suggested I attend their upcoming monthly lunch with Iraqi families and speak with the parents directly to ascertain if they would like their children to participate in my study. I accepted Naseer's invitation and attended the lunch. After Naseer introduced me to the families, I explained the purpose of the study to them in detail. Fortunately, the families were very eager to participate and were extremely welcoming towards me. I spent a couple of hours with them

familiarizing myself with the parents and the children and answering any questions they had for me.

Description of the Parent and Child Participants

I selected four of the families present at the community lunch based on the following criteria: a) had children between the age of 5 - 12 years and b) had been living in the United States for not more than five years (2014 - 2019). These four families include four married couples who live in a community of other immigrants and their level of acculturation in the mainstream American society is average. All four families practice the Islamic faith and the parents are bilingual in Arabic and English (see Table 1). These families made the difficult decision of leaving their homeland behind due to the threat to their safety in Iraq. Each of these families were targeted by terrorists for their service to the U.S. Army based in Iraq. They were considered allies of the Americans and therefore, an enemy of the rebel groups by their association with the Americans. After moving to the United States, these families have established friendships with other Iraqi families in the larger community in the PNW. They are supportive of each other and actively participate in community events, such as festivals and weddings.

There were eight Iraqi refugee children in the study, seven female and one male. The children belonged to four families, two from each family. Each of the eight children had been exposed to the Civil War in Iraq and/or its aftermath. Two of the girls experienced traumatic events directly and one of them has been diagnosed with PTSD. Each of the eight children attend local school between kindergarten through grade six. All the children in the study are bilingual, with proficiency in both Arabic and English.

Of the pool of eight children in the study, two focal children, Waheeda and Shabana, were selected for an in-depth analysis and write-up of the results (see Table 2). The rationale for the selection of these two children, Waheeda and Shabana, is as follows: a) Waheeda and Shabana had extensive exposure to extreme violence, loss of lives, destruction of homes, and other hardships because of the Civil War in Iraq (2014), b) Both children had continued exposure to gruesome images of death and destruction through media coverage during their childhood in Iraq, c) Both children have mental health problems, as conveyed by their parents during the parental pre-study interview. While Waheeda has been diagnosed with PTSD, Shabana struggles with intense nightmares and is yet to be diagnosed, and d) the remaining six children in the study had minimal to no direct exposure to violence and no known mental health conditions, to the best of the parent's knowledge as conveyed to the researcher. In light of the research questions that guided the study, it was compelling for the researcher to select and focus on Waheeda and Shabana to understand how movement, dance and other art forms can support their emotional and social development and overall well-being.

Table 1*Child and parent demographics*

Family	Child	Age (years)	Gender	Siblings	Languages spoken	Religion	Parent occupation	Moved to the United States (year)
Family one	Waheeda*	11	Female	3	Arabic English	Islam	F: technical engineer M: housewife	2014
	Nazneen	7	Female	3	Arabic English			
Family two	Shabana*	7	Female	2	Arabic English	Islam	F: family support specialist M: housewife	2016
	Aliya	5	Female	2	Arabic English			
Family three	Tanveer	11	Female	1	Arabic English	Islam	F: construction worker M: housewife	2016
	Sidra	9	Female	1	Arabic English			
Family four	Hassan	7	Male	1	Arabic English	Islam	F: welder M: student	2016
	Mumtaz	6	Female	1	Arabic English			

Note. F = father; M = mother. * focal children

Table 2*Profile of focal child participants*

Child	Age (years)	Gender	Siblings (gender, age)	Parent	Duration of exposure to war (year)	Diagnosis (if any)
Waheeda	11	F	Nazneen (F, 7) Irfan (M, 7) Mansoor (M, 4)	Parveen (mother) Atish (father)	2014 - 2015	PTSD
Shabana	7	F	Aliya (F, 5) Aamir (M, 1)	Salma (mother) Naseer (father)	2014 - 2016	none

Note. F = female; M = male.

Methodology

Research Design

The data for this study has been collected using several procedures, namely, a demographic survey, audio recorded interviews, and weekly sessions on movement and dance documented through digital filming.

The design of the study was driven by the adaptive methodology developed by Jegatheesan (2012). This qualitative methodology is based on the methodological tradition of ethnography. Ethnography is a qualitative design that examines the meaning of the behavior, the language, and the social exchange among members of a cultural group. The cultural group could be large or small and is a process of inquiry that makes prolonged observations of the culture sharing group. Ethnographers search for patterns, such as habitual social behaviors, uniformities, and so forth of the cultural group to understand their ideas and beliefs, which are expressed through language, and their social exchanges (Creswell, 2013; Fetterman, 2010; Harris, 1968). In an ethnography, data collection includes a variety of techniques such as observations, interviews, surveys, and audiovisual methods. Observations can be participant where the researcher takes part in the social context or they can be nonparticipant, where the researcher simply observes the cultural group. The interviews can be semi-structured, that is, comprising of open-ended and closed-ended questions or unstructured, that is, comprising of open-ended questions which allow conversations to flow freely. The data collected can also include artifacts, books, reports and other documents (Creswell, 2013; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

Following the philosophical underpinnings and data collection methods of ethnography, the adaptive methodology allows for adaptations to the original research design, if necessary. It draws from the iterative nature of the methodological tradition of ethnography and provides

flexibility to the researcher to adapt the design to be culturally appropriate. The process of adaptive methodology undergoes repeated cycles of data collection, analysis of data, and validity checks to conduct culturally appropriate research that adequately addresses the diversity of its participants. It entails a continuous cycle of adaptation that requires collection of additional data until the results satisfy the validity checks. It allows the researcher to undertake research respecting the cultural values and expectations of participants from multicultural backgrounds. Multicultural sensitivity is highly effective in discovering data that is comprehensive and culturally nuanced (Jegatheesan, 2012). When inadequacies are revealed in the research design during the process of data collection, the adaptive methodology allows revisions to include culturally appropriate ways. Compared to other methodological traditions in which adherence to the initial research design is necessary, the adaptive methodology was suitable for this study as it allowed the research design to have flexibility. Moreover, the flexibility and adaptability of this method is reflected in the wide variety of data collection techniques that can be employed. For instance, the researcher can incorporate ethnographic methods (e.g., conducting interviews, participant observation), visual research methods (e.g., painting, video, photography), and performance ethnography (e.g., dance), amongst others, to illuminate the understanding of the research problem. In the current study, the versatility of this method was invaluable in making adaptations for children with diverse abilities and needs. Given that this study addressed a comparatively lesser known phenomenon with a vulnerable population of young refugee children, flexibility and adaptability in the research design was essential.

Informed Consent

Each family was provided with consent forms (See Appendix G for Parent Consent Form) to confirm their participation. For their children, assent forms were provided during my

home visit to each family (See Appendix H for Child Assent Form). All four families participating in the study were assured that pseudonyms would be used in place of their real names and to protect the identity of their children in the video data, faces and any other identifiable information would be masked using video editing tools.

Demographic Survey

I created a demographic information form as a textual document and made print copies of it. During my home visit to each family, I carried these print copies with me. I collected data on the children and their parents related to age, gender, ethnicity, religion, occupation, schooling, languages spoken, extended family and date of arrival in the United States. Of the four families in the study, the parent in family three (see Table 1) who has low proficiency in English was assisted by her daughters Tanveer and Sidra in filling out the form by hand (See Appendix B for Demographic Information Survey).

Interviews with Parents

I visited each of the four families at a time and date as per their convenience and conducted pre-study interviews in English with the parents in their homes (see Appendix C for Sample Interview Questions with parents). These interviews were semi-structured, with open-ended questions and followed an informal conversational style. Specifically, the interviews were intended to gather information on the children's life experiences growing up in Iraq during the Civil War. Other issues addressed by the interview questions were a) life in their native country, b) cultural values, expectations and behaviors, c) reasons for leaving Iraq, d) hardships during the transitional period, e) assimilation and acculturation experiences in the United States, f) maintaining their ethnic culture and practices, and g) access to services for their family including educational support for their children. Furthermore, during the movement and dance sessions,

there were several occasions when parents would provide me with information on any one of these topics as listed. I made head notes (Emerson et al., 2011) of the information provided in an ad hoc basis and entered it in my field notes.

On completion of the study, I conducted post-study interviews with each family, to gather feedback on the study and any observations they made in their children's behavior during the research. All interviews, pre- and post-study, were audio recorded with the permission of the interviewees who were assured that the recording would be stopped if they so requested at any point during the interview with no explanation required. All interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Interviews with Children

To build rapport with the children, I conducted informal interviews in English with each of the eight children asking questions about their hobbies, their friends, life in school, and any other information they wanted to share with me. These interviews were one on one with each child, in the presence of their parents, in their home, and were conducted after the parental interviews. Although the children in each of the four families were initially shy when I met them in their homes, over the course of the time I spent talking with their parents, they became comfortable interacting with me (see Appendix D for Sample Interview Questions with Children).

Movement and Dance Sessions

In this dissertation, my conceptualization of movement and dance include expressions through different art forms, such as drawings (e.g., sketches), storytelling (e.g., comic strips with storyline), and singing. This conceptualization was informed by my conversations with parents and observations during the home visit, where I became aware of the activities that the children

enjoyed. Consequently, the study is rooted in the understanding that creative expressions through movement and dance are not exclusive categories of art forms. Although, explorations through movement and dance were the initial starting point for the study, as the sessions unfolded week by week, the children engaged in different modes of expression besides movement and dance. The study recognizes that the creative arts are interconnected and the unstructured design of the study, based on the adaptive methodology, allowed the freedom for different expressions to emerge. Movement and dance were at the core of each session given the rigidity and muscle tension observed in the body language of the two focal children. However, the adaptability of the research design addressed the need for being cognizant of the natural direction in which the activities evolved through modalities beyond movement and dance, guided by the children.

The pre-study parent interviews provided me with an understanding of each child's personal history which in turn, informed the design of the movement and dance sessions (see Table 3). Further, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the research design followed the adaptive methodology and the design of these sessions was generated in an iterative manner. The sessions were scheduled once a week on Saturdays, every week, for a total of ten weeks. Each session was between an hour to about an hour and a half in duration. Each weekly session was video recorded and the review of the video data for each week influenced the design of the session for the following week. Movement exploration and expression were at the core of each session. Although parents were not required to attend the sessions, they were welcome to be present in the room if they or their child so preferred. Parents were assured that if they wished to withdraw their child's participation from the sessions, they were free to do so at any time. The same was true for any child who wished to withdraw. Fortunately, none of the children nor the families decided to withdraw from the study and all eight children participated in each of the ten sessions.

Location

The space for conducting the movement and dance sessions was suggested by Naseer, my main point of contact to the Iraqi community. It was a large room, used for various purposes, such as, a classroom, a meeting room, monthly community lunchroom, children's playroom, and so on. The room was housed within a community center which the families were very familiar with and visited frequently with their children. The room had folding chairs and tables and at the beginning of each weekly session, the parents and the children assisted me in stacking them in a corner, to make space for moving freely during the sessions. Likewise, at the end of each session, I rearranged all the chairs and tables, with the assistance of the families.

Video Recording of Movement and Dance Sessions

The data collection was exclusively conducted through digital filming of the sessions every week, using two video cameras on tripods placed at two corners of the room. The use of video filming is part of the qualitative method of visual research. In a film, the moving images create a tangible experience making it possible for the viewer to vicariously participate in the events depicted in the narrative. Eisner (2002) observes that visual representation is akin to a conversation and the imagery provide points for further inquiry by depicting not only what people see or hear but also what they feel. Participants in a qualitative study can manipulate the visual form to share the narrative of their experience and allow the researcher to empathize with their experience, which is critical for deeper understanding in any research inquiry (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008; McNiff, 1998).

Field Notes

Throughout the ten weeks of movement and dance sessions, I maintained a research diary where I noted my observations, passing thoughts, impressions, ideas, and reflections. Fieldnote entries were done in two ways: a) during sessions whenever possible, and b) immediately after sessions. Periodically, I reviewed my notes that led to further reflections and thoughts which I voice recorded on an audio device.

Ethics

The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The anonymity of participants has been strictly maintained by assignment of pseudonyms to all children and their parents (see Table 1 and Table 2). Given that this study involved refugee children who had experienced traumatic events, I exercised caution by being vigilant to any display of distress or anxious behavior. In preparation for any such instance of a child displaying anxiety during a session, I reached out to the parents, asking them for advice and suggestions on their preferred course of action. I was advised to contact them over the phone immediately if such a situation did arise. It is to be noted that the parents were often within reach during sessions as the four mothers socialized with each other in a different room within the same building. On some occasions, they decided to take the time to go shopping together and asked me to call them in case I needed their assistance. Fortunately, there were no instances of emotional distress that required me to contact the parents during any of the ten sessions. Finally, parents were reminded from time to time that their child had the option to participate in as many or as few of the activities in the study during each session, as they wish and were free to withdraw from the research at any time.

Table 3.*Overview of key activities during the movement and dance sessions*

Session	What was planned	What the children added
Session one	Warm up exercises followed by a name game where each child writes their name and the name of a character they love. Then, talk about what they love to do and an action (e.g., jump) their favorite character does. Next, dance the action and the action of their favorite character to the letter count in their own name. Then, 'circle dance', by holding hands and walking clockwise and anticlockwise at different paces	Children decide to write on the whiteboard, adding items to the list on their own. Waheeda wrote about her feelings, likes and dislikes. The children selected music on my phone and danced to it. Then they played musical chairs, as suggested by Waheeda. * Waheeda exercised her personal choice which allowed her to connect with the space
Session two	Circle time to talk about their past week. Then, a game of 'magic drum' where each child draws a piece of paper with names of moves (e.g., run, skip, jump, hop, shake, bend) from a toy drum and everyone else does the move till I say "freeze!"	Children created a playlist of their favorite songs on my phone and Shabana suggested many of the songs. Next, they danced to a game of musical chairs. Then, a game of 'green light, red light'. * Shabana and the other children took ownership, blending what they liked which drove enthusiasm
Session three	Circle time for chatting followed by a game 'once upon a time' where the children weave a story together, adding one idea at a time, then add sounds, imagery, characters, actions, and so on to bring the story alive. Next, a game of 'freeze the shape' where they move around the room freely, till I say aloud "freeze!" and they stand motionless wherever they are	Children added music to the game of 'freeze the shape', taking turns pausing the music as the signal to freeze. Then, Waheeda suggested 'green light, red light' and integrated the two games. * Waheeda felt comfortable experimenting with the format of the activities, driving her engagement
Session four	Circle time for chatting followed by a game of 'fabric dance' where children gather in the center of the room, each child holding an end of a set of colorful scarves, moving freely and weaving patterns naturally	Children incorporated fabric dance in musical chairs. * the freedom to decide how they wanted to participate allowed the children to have agency
Session five	Circle time for chatting followed by a choice of game: 'fabric dance' or 'once upon a time' or 'freeze the shape'	Children divided into smaller groups. Each group picked one of the games. Then, the groups merged naturally, till everyone was back to dancing, turning on their favorite playlist on my phone. Wrap up with musical chairs as they danced around the chairs
Session six	Circle time for chatting and sharing a joke (prompted in session five). Then, a game of 'shape shifter' where each child takes turns to draw a shape while the rest of the children create it collectively with their bodies (e.g. create a triangle as a group holding hands)	Children integrated the idea of 'freeze the shape' into the game of 'shape shifter'. Wrap up with musical chairs as they danced around the chairs
Session seven	Circle time for chatting followed by sharing about their own culture with me. Next, a choice of any one or more of the games or activities that were introduced through the previous sessions.	Waheeda transformed the circle time into an activity where she began documenting each child talking as she moved around the room with a video camera. Then, Waheeda and Shabana began a moving pictorial presentation of their own narratives on the whiteboard. Each child took turns filming with the camera, while the other spoke. * the flexibility in the session design enabled Waheeda to take a leadership role
Session eight	Circle time for chatting followed by brainstorming ideas for putting on a variety performance show for their parents. Next, a game of musical chairs and 'green light, red light'	Children were excited about sharing jokes and dancing to their favorite playlist. They were not keen on planning a performance for their parents. * children made their decision collectively on what they wanted to do
Session nine	Circle time for chatting followed by any game or activity of their choice	Children extended the circle time to share more jokes and fun stories. They shared with me their own plans of having a party with lots of pizza and cola in the last session the following week
Session ten	Potluck party with all the families and the children	The siblings of the participating children and all four of the mothers danced with me to Arabic music and Bollywood music

Note. * shows how the additions made and changes implemented by the children influenced their level of participation, increasing social

interaction and playfulness during the sessions. Their initiative created an energetic and joyful environment, enhancing the quality of the sessions.

Data Analysis

The aim of this dissertation study was to explore expressions through movement and dance with young refugee children and understand its implications for their well-being.

The data collection involved a variety of sources, namely, demographic survey with parents, pre- and post-study interviews with parents, informal pre-study interviews with the children and digital filming of ten movement and dance sessions over ten weeks. The research questions which guided my study are restated as follows:

1. In what ways can expressions through movement and dance support the emotional needs of young refugee children?
2. In what ways can expressions through movement and dance influence the social interactions of young refugee children?
3. In what ways can expressions through movement and dance support the well-being of young refugee children?

Development of Analytic Codes

The video recordings of the movement and dance sessions generated a large volume of video data files which I downloaded on my computer and created another copy of the files on an external hard drive, as a backup. Next, I began to organize the data files by creating folders by session and naming each video file for a session by the session name and date. Finally, I uploaded them on an online drive, in a cloud storage platform, where all the files were regularly backed up. Once the data was organized in this manner, I proceeded to the analysis of the data and creation of codes using ATLAS.ti (version 8), a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Following is a brief description of ATLAS.ti and its tools.

ATLAS.ti. This qualitative software developed at the Technical University of Berlin in 1989, is considered one of the foremost CAQDAS packages (Silver & Lewins, 2014). According to Konopasek (2008), ATLAS.ti allows the researcher to connect each element of a study and display it on the screen in an easily accessible manner. The use of CAQDAS packages, such as ATLAS.ti prove to be invaluable when working with large data sets (Gilbert et al., 2014). For the purpose of my dissertation study, it allowed me to organize and manage the large volume of data (audio and video files, images, and text-based documents) efficiently and systematically. Of the many tools available within ATLAS.ti, I primarily used quotations, open coding and memos throughout my analysis. Quotations lets the researcher select a section within a video, audio or text file, similar to highlighting a word, sentence or paragraph manually with a marker on paper. Open coding allows the researcher to create codes based on reviewing the data and linking them to the relevant data files (such as audio, video, text). Finally, the memo feature is similar to handwritten field notes, allowing the researcher to type observations, thoughts, ideas as they evolve and linking them to relevant sections of the data (see Appendix E for ATLAS.ti Screenshots of Tools used as they appear within the software window).

The Process of Analysis. The analysis began with me adding all of the data to the ATLAS.ti package. This included all audio and video files, images and text-based documents and allowed me a comprehensive view of all elements of the research, in one place. I was able to read and annotate transcripts and journal articles relevant to my literature review, as well as code and interpret the audio and video data. The data analysis progressed through three stages broadly, that is, stage one through stage three.

In stage one, I viewed every digitally recorded video file of the movement and dance sessions, from start to finish. I used the pause function to stop and add quotations (a selected

video snippet) within each video, wherever the interactions between the children piqued my curiosity. This stage was extremely time consuming. Hence, in order to prevent myself from being overwhelmed by the huge volume of video data, I created a schedule for myself. At the end of a session, I would watch the videos from that day over the next five to six days before the next session took place. In this way, I was able to do a first-level analysis of the data week by week and inform my design of the session for the following week, in keeping with the adaptive methodology. At the end of stage one, I had created an inventory of quotations within ATLAS.ti connected to the video data.

In stage two, I repeatedly watched every video snippet that I had selected and marked with a quotation in stage one. As I immersed myself in the finer details of the data, I used inductive analysis to extrapolate units of information and shaping patterns. Further, I looked for themes and interrelationships between them. Going back and forth between the emerging themes and the data, I gradually identified a set of broad themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Creswell, 2013). From these themes observed in movement and behavior, I started creating codes by labeling each code with a name that to me captured its essence. For example, some of my open codes were body awareness, muscle tension, fluid movements, attunement, initiative, agency, humor, joyful expression, spontaneity, peer support, social awareness, and so forth. In this way, I created a list of codes that were generated by my analysis of the videos. Each code was now linked to as many or as few of the video snippets that belonged to that specific code. In this way I used open coding to code my entire data. Next, I took snapshots from the video snippets using the 'capture snapshot' function in ATLAS.ti (version 8). Then, I made observation notes using the memo feature and linked them to each quotation (selected video snippet) that inspired the memo, to assist me in the data analysis. Wherever relevant, my memos were linked to the codes I

created. At the end of stage two, I had created an inventory of codes, snapshots and memos, in addition to the inventory of quotations from stage one.

In the third and final stage, I spent numerous hours watching and revisiting the movement and dance session video clips filtered in stage two. This allowed me to create a shortlist from the broad themes identified during stage two and then establish the key themes for the final analysis. Lastly, after creating this shortlist guided by my research questions, I selected the movement vignettes which were illustrative of the key themes. I recognize the characteristic of reflexivity that is integral to my study, as it is for any qualitative inquiry. Reflexivity acknowledges that qualitative researchers convey their personal background (e.g., cultural experiences, personal history) in a qualitative study (Wolcott, 2008). They reflect on their own voice and perspective. A sincere voice conveys genuineness and reliability. Although pure objectivity is unattainable and pure subjectivity undercuts trustworthiness, the focus of the researcher is indicative of the balance between understanding and portraying the world sincerely in all its complexity (Creswell, 2013).

To validate my analysis and establish the trustworthiness of the interpretation of results, I did member checking through post-study interviews where I shared my findings with the parents of the children. The credibility of my results was further enhanced through triangulation as I have different sources of data which acted as checks against each other. For example, the pre-study interview data checked against the emerging themes in the movement and dance sessions or the emerging themes checked against the parental feedback attained through the post-study interviews. To address researcher bias, I approached one of my European American peers to review select video clips and the interpretations I derived from them. He independently viewed the video clips. Whenever he expressed any concerns or lack of understanding, I had to provide

him with the cultural context of their interactions which led him to understand my interpretations. As a person belonging to a culture outside of the research participants, his evaluation provided an unbiased and distinctive lens that supported my findings. Finally, I shared a range of video clips and transcripts with my faculty advisor. Her research expertise covers refugee families of Islamic faith with average acculturation in the American society. These families have raised children with disabilities and trauma in the United States. In addition to the video clips and transcripts, I discussed my codes, emerging themes, and observation notes with her at every stage of my data collection, data coding, analysis and interpretation of research findings.

CHAPTER III

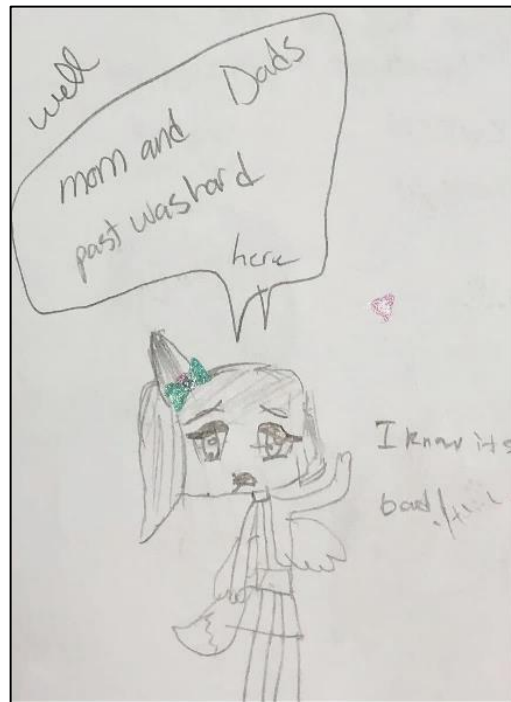
WAHEEDA

The self-portrait (Figure 1) illustrates the inner turmoil that Waheeda was battling. In a speech bubble, she wrote ‘...mom and dad’s past was hard here’. Her expression is one of deep concern, big sad looking eyes, eyebrows raised, lips sealed tight, as if held in fear. She has angel wings, which could suggest that she wants to be the angel that is looking out for her parents. However, her right wing is close to the ground, as though heavy and tired, while she raises her left hand to assert, ‘I know it’s bad’

[FN, March 16 2019]

Figure 1

Self-portrait of Waheeda



Child and Family Background

Waheeda is an eleven-year-old Iraqi refugee child who lives on the west coast of the United States. She lives with her parents and three younger siblings. Waheeda and her three siblings were born in Iraq. In 2013, the family temporarily moved to the United States for a few months and returned to Iraq. In 2015, when Waheeda was seven years old, the family moved to the United States again and have lived here since then.

In the years before their move to the United States, Waheeda's father Atish, who is a civil engineer, worked at Sunex, a multinational oil company in Iraq. He earned a high salary that allowed him to provide a comfortable life for his wife and children. They owned a big house in the town and lived in a joint family household. Atish spoke Arabic and English and in his free time he volunteered as an Arabic interpreter for the American Army stationed in Iraq. His tenure at Sunex and his interactions with the soldiers, was a window of exposure to American culture. Further, he became aware of better medical care in the United States which piqued his interest since his wife Parveen was seeking treatment for a medical condition she had at the time. In 2013, Atish decided to apply to the American embassy in Iraq, to move his family to the United States under the Special immigration visa category. On approval, the family arrived in the United States in early 2013. Waheeda's mother, Parveen shared the anxiety she felt when leaving her parents behind in Iraq. It was a difficult choice to make. She was pregnant with her youngest son at the time. Parveen explained, "In the beginning, I just felt it's so difficult to leave my father and mother because, it's every other three days, I see them. It's so difficult but I told them that we can go and check on my health condition, maybe, I see there is a very good doctor who can

fix my kidney. We just come to check. And then I already visit the doctor three times and she just gave me medicine, but she cannot treat me.”

The U.S. Government provided housing with rent for one month although their employment authorization documents were expected to take about three months to be processed. After a month, they were left to provide for themselves and given they were still waiting for their employment authorization, Waheeda’s parents were unable to work and pay their own bills. Atish spoke with anxiety and apprehension about their situation during the time, saying, “I am not working for three months and then I work for, I think a month, before I leave. I work in hotel as maintenance guy, just to replace, replace like the door handle, and (on) some days clean something.” Working as a maintenance person even though he was a qualified civil engineer hurt his feelings:

I am not saying it’s a shame to work in this, and I need to pay the bills. But it’s hard because it hurt me. When I work there, I remember every day it’s...I feel like somebody stabbed me (gestures stabbing his heart with his fist), because it’s hard, it’s hard on myself (has tears in his eyes).

After three and a half months, Waheeda’s family was struggling to adapt to the life in American society. Atish said that social life in the United States is different compared to Iraq:

When I came here, just three months here, I don’t like that feeling. Here there’s no social life and the people, I have neighbors here. Neighbors are very good, but I see everyone’s door is closed. There’s no good morning house to house, nothing. My house (in Iraq), we have neighborhood, every neighbor knows the others around, we visit each other like

family. We are not just neighbors, we are like family. Here, nothing! There's no family, no support.

The family found themselves socially isolated and decided to move back to Iraq after three months of living in the United States. Waheeda was six years old when the family returned to Iraq. The family lived in their large family house which was divided into two adjoining parts, the big house and the small house, both under the same roof. Waheeda's paternal grandparents, paternal uncle, aunt, and their children, daughter Zeenat (six-year-old) and sons Zafar (nine-year-old) and Atif (three-month-old) lived in the big house. And Waheeda lived in the small house with her parents and siblings. Waheeda's family gradually eased back into the life they were accustomed to in Iraq.

However, within a year of their return, in August 2014, the Civil war broke out in Iraq (BBC News, 2018). Islamic terrorists invaded town after town and the American troops battled the turmoil and unrest in the country. Waheeda's family became a prime target for the terrorists who decided to annihilate her entire family by bombing their house. Atish explained to me why he thought his family was targeted by the Islamic terrorist. He reasoned that due to his employment in an American Oil company as well as his volunteer work as an interpreter for the American Army, he was considered a friend of the Americans. And anyone who is a friend of the Americans is considered, by default, an enemy of the Islamic fundamentalist groups:

I remember I have three friends that worked with me. Two of them, they are dead, killed by militants. They are killed by the militants because they are working with Americans. Me, I worked just as interpreter. I worked a year or maybe a year and a half and this is second job for me. After the United States started to invade Iraq in 2003, the people in Iraq, they are not speaking English. Nobody is speaking English. So, I work with

them...my English is not good, but I try, I learnt it myself, in college I push myself to learn English. My two friends that worked with me, they both received threats. I also received threat message. I received three messages, threatening. So, before anything happened, I asked the Americans, "Have you seen this threat message?" and they do not do anything! So, what I decide? To leave the job with them! So, I leave it, after I received threat in job. After my friends got killed, I decided to (make a) change. So, that's the reason behind the first time I came to the United States. They granted a Special immigration visa and I came here but I don't like the life here, (it was) so difficult in the beginning, no support, nobody helps you.

On the day the terrorist bombed the family, six-year-old Waheeda was at home with her mother and siblings spending time as on any other regular day. With the deafening sound of the bomb, Waheeda and her three siblings huddled together tightly with their mother. The blast destroyed the adjoining big house. It killed Waheeda's cousins, Zafar and Atif and she witnessed their death in front of her eyes. Her mother rushed to move the surviving members out of the house as quickly as possible and then called her father who happened to be at work. Atish provided details of the impact the attack had on his family:

The ISIS invaded. They put some explosives in my house! I lost two people from my family, my brother's sons. He was living in my house. I have big house, originally, it's two houses, like joint family, (adjacent to each other). One of my houses, (the bigger house of the two) my brother and his family live there. ISIS put some explosives in one of our houses (big house) and my brother and his family are in that house, all went underground! Some of them survive (Atish's parents) but we lost two persons, two kids.

One of them is nine years old and the other is three months old (Atish's brother's sons).
The upper storey, there's smoke outside. All the walls, they all collapse inside. This was
in August 2014.

The terrorist had planted the bomb in the bigger house where the extended family lived and thus,
Waheeda, her mom and siblings survived the attack. Despite the gravity of the attack and the
destruction caused by the bombing, Waheeda's paternal grandparents, paternal uncle and aunt
and their daughter Zeenat survived the attack as well. Atish, described his wife's frantic call to
him on the day of the blast:

I was at work and my wife called me on the phone. I remember at that time, she's
screaming and crying! (She said) all your family under the ground! ISIS explosion and
everyone underground, all of the big house is underground!

In 2014, because of the dangers that were evident, Waheeda's parents decided to move
back to the United States.

After that incident, I say to myself, now, I should be thinking about saving my family, I
need to put some plan to come back (to the United States) again! So, I leave everything
there (in Iraq), take my family, speak with the embassy in the United States.

To complete the process for their special immigration visas to the United States, Atish traveled
with his family from their hometown to Baghdad, where they found lodging in a hotel for the
night. However, that very night, their hotel was the target for yet another terrorist attack.
Fortunately for the family, each of the four children and the parents made it out of the hotel
safely without any physical injuries. Parveen described the incident as:

When we apply for visa, there is another incident that happened to us. ISIS, they invade the hotel we were in, and we had our visa appointment the next day. On that night, we are all scared. Waheeda saw the dead people. We found some place to hide under the stairs, all four kids. There were a lot of explosions, maybe 15 bombs. I thought to myself that if we can just go outside from here if we go to America, we will never come back again!

In January 2015, Waheeda moved back to the United States with her siblings and her parents (see Figure 2). Parveen expressed that although they knew they would face the same challenges in the United States as on their first visit, they resolved to do the best they can to adapt:

It was the same (here), but because of what's happening in Iraq, like all the dead people, all this stuff just make us want not to remember, even here the life is so difficult, but when we remember the life in my country, we just stop thinking about going back, just be like...be little bit strong (this time). (Mrs. Parveen)

Atish shared that he applied to numerous jobs, until he found one as a technician engineer, after a four-month waiting period. However, being a civil engineer, he was overqualified for the position. He was surprised to find that although he worked as a civil engineer at Sunex in Iraq, the same credentials did not qualify him for positions at the branch office of Sunex in the United States:

I contact with my company that I work with in Iraq. They have big office in California. I give them a call and speak with them, they say, "sorry, we cannot accept". I told them I work with you in Iraq for three years as engineer and I have all the papers and all the recommendations. But they say, "Sorry, Iraq is not United States. We know you work

with us in Iraq as engineer but here you have to go through a process to be engineer”. It’s not fair!

Waheeda’s mother has a diploma in computer science from Iraq, and she expressed a desire to earn an advanced degree in the United States. However, taking care of her four children demands almost all her time and attention. Mansoor, her youngest child, has a diagnosis of autism and she takes him to a therapist regularly. Her older son Irfan has been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) while Waheeda has been diagnosed with PTSD. However, despite the demands of parenting four children, three of whom have a clinical diagnosis, Parveen has reached out to the larger Iraqi community in the PNW. She offers her volunteer support at a non-profit organization, serving children with special needs from refugee families. Over the years, she has become a voice for parents who do not speak English and has taken an active role in guiding them towards available resources for their children. Her husband proudly said:

My wife, she’s very social. She makes friends easily. She goes and does her volunteer stuff, parties...she tried to communicate with others, connect with the community, sometimes be a volunteer.

Through her support work with Iraqi families, Parveen has expanded her social circle and connected with over forty Iraqi families on the west coast of the United States. The families meet once every month at their local community center. Parveen said, “We just feel like helping each other. It’s nice to meet people every month. They are like my close friends.” She has developed a close bond with these families over the years, and they have become part of her new circle of friends.

Figure 2.

Timeline of key events in Waheeda's life

<u>Year</u>	<u>Event</u>
2019	● Eleven-year-old Waheeda participates in the weekly movement and dance sessions. During the researcher's home visit and session one, Waheeda's body language conveys fatigue and disinterest
2018	● At the age of ten, Waheeda is diagnosed with PTSD. She continues to struggle with recurring nightmares and has frequent mood fluctuations. She interacts with her younger siblings at home and plays with them but has no friends in school
	Waheeda joins a local school along with her siblings. Her parents notice changes in her behavior that pose social and emotional challenges over the next few years. She is socially withdrawn and unable to make friends in school. She has intense nightmares every night and stays awake all night through morning, until she falls asleep due to exhaustion
2015	● At the age of seven, Waheeda moves to the United States permanently with her parents and three younger siblings, fearing the threats to their safety, leaving behind their extended family in Iraq. The family start their new life in a suburb in the Pacific Northwest
	★ Terrorists attack the hotel in Baghdad where Waheeda and her family were staying overnight for their immigration visa interview the following morning. Waheeda and her family hide under the stairs in the hotel and manage to escape unharmed. Waheeda witnesses the killing of many of the hotel guests
	★ Terrorists bomb Waheeda's house in her hometown in Iraq. Six-year old Waheeda witnesses the death of her cousins nine-year-old Zafar and three-month-old infant Atif. Waheeda, her three siblings, her father Atish, mother Parveen and paternal grandparents survive the attack
2014	● In August, the Civil War breaks out in Iraq
	After three and a half months, her family decides to move back to Iraq as they struggled to adapt to life in the United States
2013	● In early 2013, at the age of five, Waheeda moves with her parents and siblings to the United States under special immigration visa category for refugees

Waheeda's Emotional Health: Early Years and After the Civil War (2014 - 2017)

During her early childhood, Waheeda was a cheerful, happy child and was deeply loved by her maternal grandparents. She often visited her maternal grandparents, uncle and two aunts, and spent weekends with them. Waheeda's mother reminisced about their social life in Iraq:

Every Friday, we go visit my family house, we stay for two days...the kids have fun, sometimes we go shopping together. I love the life there, but bad things happen all the time and made my country, every month worse than a month before.

She then emphasized, "Waheeda is THE granddaughter, yeah, the favorite with my mother and father. She just had fun there with everyone."

Waheeda enjoyed playing with her siblings and the other children in their neighborhood in Iraq. She often socialized with other children at a nearby park while cradling her younger siblings playfully on the swings.

In the months and subsequent years after the two tragedies, Waheeda's personality underwent a sea change. The cheerful and spirited child became distraught with anxiety, fear, and fluctuating moods. The family's move to the United States following the Civil War in Iraq further complicated her emotional challenges. She found herself distanced from her grandparents and the larger extended family in Iraq with whom she was accustomed to socializing regularly. Suddenly, her social interactions became limited to her parents and siblings at home. As Parveen said, "When we come here (United States), it became difficult for her, she doesn't have any friends, just us, this family. She started to go to school, but she doesn't know how to make a lot

of friendships there, she has become very shy, so it is very difficult for her to make any friends. I think she has just closed herself.”

The Experience and Embodiment of Family Loss

Waheeda’s parents shared with me that Waheeda had seen the body of Zafar. Zafar’s demise was so sudden and violent that it caused Waheeda to go into deep shock. A distressed Waheeda began to experience behavioral and personality changes over the years. Although her younger siblings were present at the time of the attack, Waheeda’s parents believe that they were much too young to have been impacted with the same intensity of emotions as Waheeda experienced. Atish said, “she remembers, yes, but our younger children, they are not affected, I think because they were so small, they don’t remember. But she (Waheeda) remembers everything clearly, what was going on, she’s aware of what happened. She remembers both incidents.”

In 2018, at the age of ten years, Waheeda was diagnosed with PTSD. Atish narrated the story of how Waheeda came back from school one day and told him and his wife that she had seen Zafar (her dead cousin) in school:

The kid who died, she and he played together, and she saw him when he died. There are many times when she remembers him. Like last time, she told us, three months ago. She told me she saw him, she saw him in school, standing far away. She looked at me and said, “Do you know what I see today in school? I see him. He come back to me. I saw Zafar and he was just staring at me and he looked at me for about thirty minutes, following me wherever I go and then I try to find him, and he is just gone!” And then she just cried, she cries because she still remembers him, they lived together, played together.

Recurring Nightmares

Atish and Parveen informed me that Waheeda has nightmares almost every day and struggles to sleep at night. One of her fears is falling asleep at night and never waking up again. So, every night, she stays awake till her fatigued eyes naturally close themselves, in the early hours of the morning. As Parveen explained to me:

She now has a problem, she never sleeps! After the incident, she doesn't like to sleep. We fight with her every day because she says- '*I want to stay up!*', she won't sleep. She is scared to sleep, maybe she will not wake up again, she's thinking about that and she's fighting to stay awake. She says, '*I need to stay up*', she is fighting hard and she's angry and she will keep the TV on all night. She stays up till 3 am or 4 am every day. She sleeps when tired, not when she needs to sleep"

Social and Emotional Challenges

Parveen confided in me that she couldn't quite understand her daughter's changing moods. She said, "I don't understand her because sometimes she just feels angry, sometimes she just loves to make a fun joke, it changes, she has different characters. I don't know, don't understand her. She's nervous all the time, very easily nervous. And in school, she's very shy." Waheeda meets a counsellor in her school twice a week but Atish expressed his doubts about the counseling sessions, saying, "I don't see any difference! It's been a year since she started going for counseling". When I asked Waheeda's parents what changes they would ideally like to see in her, they listed the following: having more confidence, being able to make friends more easily, and being comfortable talking to her teachers and other adults. Further, they shared some of the goals they had already established with her school counselor. These goals were to help Waheeda

explore and increase her self-esteem, explore positive self-talk, positive self-image, improve her assertiveness and social skills, develop effective communication skills, learn coping skills to control her feelings and to identify and verbalize her emotional needs. Atish reiterated about confidence:

More confidence because sometimes I am hurt when I see how she is so shy, and she's not confident. Sometimes she says, "*I am ugly,*" and I say, "*No, no, you are very beautiful. Why do you say that?*" She says she thinks she is ugly because she cannot make friends.

Waheeda's Initial Encounters with the Researcher

The early encounters of Waheeda with me were characterized by a disinterested, cautious Waheeda, who had a flat expression on her face. My first extensive interaction with her family was on a home visit. While I was talking with her parents, her three siblings, driven by curiosity, frequently ran in and out of the living room where we were seated. They smiled at me before running inside and then running back into the living room again and again.

However, Waheeda did not join them. Instead, she sat quietly watching an animation show on TV, in the adjacent media room. Halfway into our conversation, when called upon by her father, she hesitantly entered the room, shoulders slightly raised with tension in her muscles, face looking down at the floor, as she sat next to him on the couch. She avoided making eye contact with me. Her parents told her that there were a few dance and movement activities that I was planning for the weeks ahead, and she was invited to participate. Waheeda looked unenthusiastic and looked questioningly at her mother. And then, still looking down, declared that she did not want to dance. To emphasize her decision, she shook her head gently from side

to side. Her parents seemed a little alarmed and tried to reason with her. Just then I stepped in and reassured Waheeda that she was not required to participate if she did not want to. And if she chose to be part of the activities, simply showing up and being there was just as good too. And she would not be alone. Her younger sister Nazneen and other friends would be there as well. There was a moment of silence as she contemplated over her earlier decision. And then swiftly grabbing the child assent form, scribbled an oddly tiny signature on it! I noticed how tightly she held the pen, almost piercing the paper! Her face concealed any emotion as she stood up and hurriedly left the room.

The Movement Sessions with Waheeda

Following is a discussion of the observations during the ten movement and dance sessions with Waheeda. In this section, 'FN' indicates fieldnotes and 'VC' indicates video clips.

Body language in Early Sessions

My initial interactions with Waheeda were indicative of undischarged energy in her. On my family visit, I had noticed rigidity in the body as she sat nervously on the sofa, a feeling of being weighed down. Now, in session one, I observed the same body rigidity. There was tension in her muscles and a look of tiredness on her face. When Waheeda showed up with her siblings and parents on this day, she neither looked eager nor disinterested. It was difficult for me to gauge her feelings. She responded to me when I greeted her, saying "Hi" under her breath but her gaze didn't meet mine. She sat down with the other children and me, in a circle on the floor, looking down and sideways at the corners of the room but avoiding my eyes. I gave a simple prompt to all the children. I asked them to talk about their favorite things, as a way for everyone to ease into a conversation and become comfortable in the space. Everyone began talking about

their favorite animals, animated characters and favorite foods. Waheeda held on tightly to her sling purse, as though she was getting ready to leave any minute. She seemed completely disinterested, not saying much until she asked exasperatedly, “What are we doing? This is boring!!”

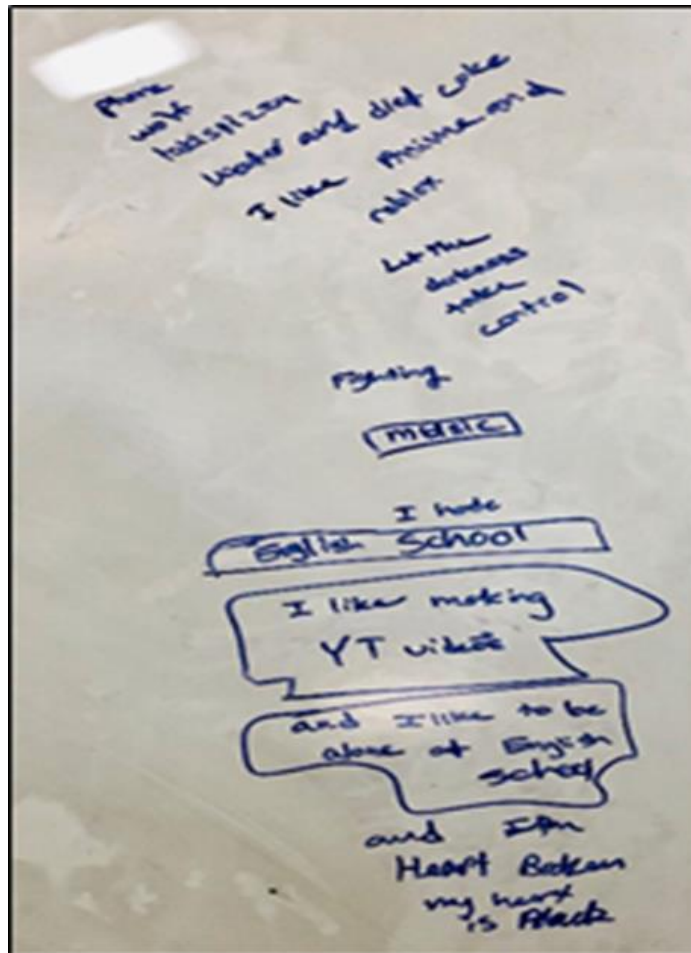
The conversation continued to the whiteboard in one corner of the room where each child began listing their favorites. Waheeda showing reluctance, dragged her feet to the board, then picked a marker pen and stood to the right corner of the board, claiming her spot and raising her arm to write. Her right arm hovered at the exact spot, the marker floating close to the board, for nearly ten minutes. She stood rooted to her spot. Her behavior stood out amidst the other children who were wildly scribbling and chatting away. After a long pause, Waheeda’s hand began to move as she wrote on the whiteboard in very small form. Her face carried no expression, leaving me with no cues to what she was thinking. However, she was aware of where I was in the room, noticing my interactions with the other children as she observed me from the corner of her eye. She then took a step back, walked away from the board briefly to the center of the room and said to me indirectly, “I wrote so small!” and then suddenly ran back to the whiteboard, erasing everything she wrote. A little later, noticing me taking pictures of the whiteboard to document what each child had written, she commented, “You didn’t get my picture.” I informed her that I did take a picture before she deleted her own writing. She seemed a little surprised but did not look upset in the least and quickly changed the topic of our conversation by inquiring what activity was coming up next in the session.

Waheeda made a list of things she liked and disliked on the whiteboard (see Figure 3). Among things she liked were ‘pizza’, ‘diet coke’, ‘anime’, and ‘fighting’. She created boxes

around certain other things she liked ('Music' and 'I like making YT videos', referring to YouTube videos) or disliked ('I hate English school', 'and I like to be alone at English school'), highlighting their importance. This is consistent with her mother's description of Waheeda's experience at school: "She does not like English school, she says no one likes her, she has no friends there".

Figure 3

Waheeda's list of 'likes and dislikes'



- Phone
- Wolf
- Takis & pizza
- Water and diet coke
- I like Anime and roblox
- Let the darkness take control
- Fighting
- Music
- I hate English school
- I like making YT videos
- and I like to be alone at English school
- and I'm Heart Broken
- my heart is Black

Note. Waheeda writing on the whiteboard during session one.

Waheeda seemed to have found alternative ways to alert me about her feelings. For example, pretending to walk around the room, as though she did not care if I had read her writing or not, she was in fact, watching me carefully. Through her last sentence on the whiteboard that screamed out to me, I realized that Waheeda had opened a small window for me to peep into her life:

‘and I’m Heart Broken my heart is Black’

This simple activity which the other children participated in with lots of giggles and laughter, was an intensely emotional experience for her. She used it as a tool to reach out to me. However, Waheeda avoided engaging her eyes with mine. She would look vaguely at a distance or would turn her head sideways and look away from me. Often, she noticed me from the corner of her eyes but would lower them quickly if she saw me looking in her direction. Her discomfort in making eye contact with me indicated her underlying anxiety around social interactions. It was difficult for her to be fully present in each moment, resulting in an emotionless demeanor. However, her writing on the board in session one indicated just the opposite, that she, in fact, wanted to share, to engage with me. This made me realize that despite her disinterested and fatigued external body language, she was energetically charged, as is the case with trauma survivors whose entire nervous system is filled with shock energy.

[FN, March 2019] She does not look at me (the others do). Stands further away from me than the other children. Activities I suggested today, Waheeda did not seem interested. Looks like she is bored...

Progression Over the Weekly Movement Sessions

Halfway through session one, the children and I gathered at the center of the room. I asked them to repeat after me as I demonstrated to them a few warmup exercises. Together, we took deep breaths, shook our arms and legs, and let our bodies hang loose. I introduced our next activity 'circle dance', and upon my instructions, everyone stood in a circle holding hands. I guided them to walk slowly clockwise and then changed the direction to anti-clockwise. Then, to add an element of fun, I suggested a mix of paces. Accordingly, they began moving from regular to slow pace, from fast to slow, from slow to slow motion, from slow motion to fast and back again to regular pace. Waheeda seemed quite amused with the sudden change in pace, especially the shift from slow motion to fast. The other children were in giggles as they pulled each other gently in very slow movement and had to resist the urge to walk as they normally would.

Taking Initiative

As we were wrapping up the 'circle dance' activity, Waheeda asked rather impatiently, "What are we doing next?" I noticed a hint of excitement on her face and realized that she was not asking me a question, rather she had something on her mind. As I looked in her direction she exclaimed, "*Oh waittt.... I know! I know! Musical chairs!*" She was suggesting our next activity and looked indirectly at me, waiting for my reaction. This was the first sign of Waheeda being proactive, of taking initiative. I encouraged her as well as the other children to make more suggestions. Interestingly, it was Waheeda who came up again with yet another activity, a game called 'green light, red light.' Noticing my uncertain expression, another child volunteered to describe the game to me. She explained that the group selects a leader who stands at one end of the room and the goal is to reach the leader first. When the leader says, 'Green light', everyone

starts walking towards him/her and when the leader says aloud 'Red light', everyone must pause and stay motionless. Whoever moves is out of the game and the game resumes with the leader saying 'Green light' again. There was considerable excitement in the air among the children, as they tried to decide which of the two games, that is, 'musical chairs' and 'green light, red light' they would select over the other. I suggested we play both, one after the other, which was received with a look of disbelief, followed shortly by wide smiles on their faces. Moments later, Waheeda, losing no time, began arranging chairs for the game of musical chairs. All the other children followed her lead and began placing the chairs in the center of the room. The children were soon immersed in the game and with every break in the music, the excitement continued to grow. I realized how by the end of session one, the space was already beginning to take on a character of its own; a space created by the children themselves, with me being the facilitator.

[VC, March 2019] Green light, red light...arranging chairs for musical chairs.

Moving Towards Engaged Body Language

Over the next couple of weeks, during session two and three, Waheeda's disinterested body language began to dissipate gradually. Following is a description of her interactions with the other children and me in session two, which speaks to an increase in Waheeda's engagement in the space.

As we sat in a circle on the floor, each child took turns sharing their experiences of the week that had passed. They qualified their week by calling it a good week or a bad week or any other way they wanted to describe it. And then they talked about the highlights of the week to justify why they felt the way they did about the week. Waheeda sat right next to me, with her knees folded and her body resting on her heels. Her hands close to her body, she placed them

squarely on her thighs, looking either sideways or down but never at me. The children were so excited to share their stories that everyone began talking at the same time! Waheeda quickly reacted by saying, “We can’t talk because everyone’s talking right now! It’s going to get messy!” Her reaction signaled to me that Waheeda was eager to share as well. I suggested that if anyone speaks over the other, the rest of us would make the noise “*Sshhhhhhh*” as a reminder to be quiet. The children began giggling, repeating after me “*Sshhhhhhh*” until finally everyone calmed down and we began sharing our weekly narratives.

At one point, it was Waheeda’s sister Nazneen’s turn to share. Nazneen sat facing me, gracefully rolling up the right leg of her pants up to her knee and explained, “I got this scratch (on the left leg), and this scratch (on the right leg) on Friday during recess!” She had a smile on her face as she displayed her scratch proudly, her upper body playfully swaying. Waheeda watched her sister intently while she spoke. I was amused by the elegance with which Nazneen placed her right feet on the floor, tipped on her toes as she gently rolled her pants. Unable to resist myself, I reenacted her actions, saying, “What a stylish way of rolling your pants!” This remark made Waheeda spontaneously look at me as she burst out laughing! It was a precious moment, being the first instance of Waheeda making direct eye contact with me.

While still laughing and giggling, she began to reenact her sister’s movements, moving her hands as though rolling her own pants, following my lead. The portrayal itself naturally unfolded her legs, loosened up her body while she continued to look at me. Waheeda looked exhilarated and displayed her joy physically. With an incredulous look, she screamed, “She’s happy that she got a scratch!” As she continued to laugh, her head and then her whole body began to move back and forth and from side to side, as she exclaimed to me, “You’re FUNNY!”

Watching her laugh so openly and loudly, another child Sidra commented, *“this is the first time all week she’s laughing! All she does is this (face down). But this time she’s laughing!”* Hearing the comment Waheeda looked somewhat self-conscious and she looked down at the floor, avoiding eye contact with Sidra. However, when I responded saying, “oh that’s good!”, she lifted her head back up again and smiled shyly. I realized that I was making progress in connecting with Waheeda in leaps and bounds. Being the first instance of Waheeda making direct and continued eye contact with me, it marked one of the turning points in our ongoing interactions. It was further remarkable in the way she allowed herself to laugh loudly, to giggle freely and to relax the tension in her body while playfully reenacting my silly depiction of her sister’s movements. *Something was waking up inside her slowly but surely.* And I believe it was the reemergence of her childhood spontaneity. *[FN, March 2019] During sharing time, sits next to me and her sister. Mixed musical chair with green light red light. And she laughed today! And made eye contact! (during my joke!)...;[VC, March 2019] Laughs hard at my joke! Reenacts sister’s move. Says to me, “You are FUNNY!”*

Growth Through Active Engagement and Shared Experiences

By the time we were a month into sessions, the children had created their own routine where they would begin each session by playing music on my phone which was connected to a portable speaker. Couple of them had taken the time out during prior weeks to create a playlist of their favorite songs to dance to. On one such occasion, three of the children, Shabana, Aliya and Nazneen were dancing around the room and then stopping by the wall mirrors to watch themselves dance. Waheeda stood right in the middle of the room, looking at them, following their movements with her eyes but not moving herself.

At one point, seven-year-old Shabana, looked directly at Waheeda and showed her a dance movement with her feet and hands. Waheeda simply observed, holding her palms together but her feet were no longer firmly planted flat on the floor. She had shifted her weight to her right leg letting her left toe swing gently. A little while later, she began imitating the footwork that Shabana had demonstrated to her earlier. By now, Shabana was swirling around the room and had spontaneously created a small sequence of movements that Nazneen and Aliya followed. They would swing one leg forward, thumping the floor with the other while tapping her fingers to the music, all in unison. It was a difficult step and seemed to draw Waheeda's attention enough to compel her to move. She looked at Shabana and began imitating the move. Then she joined Aliya and Nazneen and while facing the mirror, began to work earnestly on learning the move. I watched from a distance, careful not to make Waheeda self-conscious. But I could not help smiling to myself. Waheeda was showing signs of being present, in the moment, bringing herself to the space, emotional as much as physical. Waheeda along with the other children had created this space for themselves collectively. There were many moments when Waheeda chose not to move and stayed in one place. However, gradually, the instances of Waheeda moving around and engaging with the other children were becoming more noticeable. Waheeda's body language suggested a growing feeling of ease in her. She was letting herself loosen up, allowing her mind and body to step out occasionally, from a constant state of hypervigilance. Waheeda was engaging more actively with the other children in the room. Through these interactions, Waheeda was showing signs of feeling more alive in her body and was willing to explore something new. *[FN, March 2019] says hello! To me, hugs me, runs to arrange chairs (looks enthusiastic today!)...imitates Shabana's dance (shoulders less tight, right leg swing! Nice! Small step!)*

The Mind and the Body, an Ongoing Conversation

Creative Self-expression

Over a period of four weeks, Waheeda demonstrated increasing engagement in the sessions. The game of musical chairs that she had suggested in session one, was integrated as a regular exercise in every session thereafter. Waheeda, together with the other children had transformed a simple game of musical chairs into an exercise in free movement, exploration, body awareness, joyful expression and energy release. Similarly, the game of 'green light, red light' changed into a delightful dance of fluid movements while the music played. Couple of children in each session would take turns starting and pausing the music while the rest danced around the room and would 'freeze' as soon as the music was paused. Waheeda would often regulate the activity, giving instructions to the other children: "Everyone! We are getting started! Freeze that shape!" The movement exercises provided an avenue for energy release for all the children. For Waheeda in particular, these movement activities were helping to release the undischarged energy contained in her.

Feeling Alive - Changes in Emotional Growth

I noticed a gradual release in muscle tension over the weeks and her body rigidity was slowly dissipating. Her neck, shoulders, her eyes, and her overall posture seemed to be moving towards a comfortable state. Her movements across the floor had expanded from standing squarely in one place to joining the other children while they were dancing. In the initial sessions, she would observe the other children and after a period of 'feeling the mood' in the room, she would join them and imitate their steps. However, as we progressed halfway into our study, Waheeda's movements became more spontaneous. She would playfully jump and run

across the room. She gestured with her hands often when talking and her facial expressions became more pronounced. Waheeda seemed more in touch with her body, her emotions, and mindfully aware of others in the space. She not only took initiative and participated in each activity but went beyond to insist everyone else participate as well. This was an indication that she was not threatened or anxious to be in the space with either me or the children around her. Waheeda's behavior was one of playful and active engagement with everyone in the room, a reflection of being attuned to the needs and emotions of others, a capacity to connect. She showed signs of feeling joy within her and reached out for emotional nourishment through social interactions and attunement. An increase in awareness of our own core needs is a step towards living fully in our bodies, of being fully present in the moment. *[VC, March 2019] Lots of action...excellent jump!...*

Playful Expressions: Waheeda Experimenting with Movement

During the game of 'freeze the shape' in session five (see Table 3), Waheeda walked around the room, get the children to assemble in the center of the room. She then noticed her sister Nazneen looking at her, unsure of what the rules of the game were, although she had played it in previous weeks. Waheeda immediately walked up to her and began explaining the details. Besides her enthusiasm, what stood out to me was her use of free-flowing hand gestures as she articulated her thoughts and her eyes grew bigger in excitement. When she was satisfied with her own explanation, she waited in anticipation for the music to begin. As the children began dancing to the music, Waheeda was on high alert, anticipating the 'pause' in music any moment, so she could freeze immediately. It struck me that her state of hypervigilance and undischarged energy, a result of her traumatic past, was searching for ways of expression, either

through release or transformation. Waheeda was transforming her energetic state of being hyperalert (which typically leads to difficulties in emotional self-regulation), into a tool for tuning in more precisely to the sensory cues around her.

Another notable manifestation of her growing capacity for self-regulation was in her playful experimentation with the freeze posture itself. Every time the music paused, she stood frozen in place in whatever posture she was in, sometimes for close to a minute. The other children would begin moving after a few seconds, unable to hold still for too long. But she seemed determined to persevere and be the last one standing. I noticed her facial expression and her body postures, every time she stood motionless. Her eyes were drawn wide with a hint of mischief as she held her posture in place, sealing her lips tight to prevent herself from bursting into laughter any moment. The tension in her body was fading and she seemed much more aware of her body, the space she was in, and the other bodies around her. She was in tune with her body, she was present in that moment. This observation was further supported by many instances of her breaking into spontaneous movements, even when there was no music playing. On one such occasion, while getting a snack from her bag from the corner of the room, just as she started walking, she jumped high in the air with her hands by her side and her ponytail sweeping the air and then landed smiling and continued on to her bag. On another day, during session six, circling around the chairs while playing musical chairs, she jumped high in the air and landed on her hands and feet, at the end of each full circle. Waheeda was experiencing a certain joy in being in the collective space with everyone around, a certain lightness in her body that sparked her playfulness more and more. She chose to freeze her movement and by doing so, she changed the freeze response itself from an involuntary reaction to a choice. By expending the energy of her

emotional state on playful exploration, Waheeda began to develop an increased capacity for connection with herself and others around her.

[FN, April 2019] smiles (entry), hugs...changes freeze game! (gathers everyone to play, wow!) Talks about past week (voice clearer, louder), sits (floor) – relaxed, bent knees. Jumps to get Cheetos from bag (ponytail flying, excited today!)...

Enhancing Relationships with Others: Becoming Playful

I was increasingly becoming cognizant of the unfolding and deepening of my relationship with Waheeda, from a stranger, a mere acquaintance to a friend and possibly a future confidante. It became obvious to me that Waheeda, a highly sensitive child, was increasingly getting attuned to my energy and responded to my every move, my every action, my very presence. I understood that being authentically present with her was critical to the quality of our relationship, to her building of a foundation of trust in me. I did my best to hold space for her when she wanted to reach out but was mindful to not let my presence become overwhelming. To do this, I avoided directly gazing at her or any other child that made it obvious that I was observing them. Rather, I participated in each of the movement activities, dancing and moving, sharing stories and being silly, letting my inner child out for a stroll! In Waheeda's case, encouraging the sharing of emotions through movement expressions was a way to support her emotional growth and health. During the second month of our interactions, in session six, Waheeda looked directly at me in a playful manner and began running, looking back to see if I was following her and then would suddenly change course, as though saying 'catch me if you can!' I picked up on her playful mood and began following her, as if trying to catch her. I ran, I crawled, I blocked her with my arms spread out and she continued to escape me. Then, she stood behind Shabana, who is half her

height! Waheeda bent her knees to match up to Shabana's height and hid her face behind Shabana's head as Shabana stood facing me with an amused and excited look on her face. Waheeda giggled as she stared at me, watching me from a distance, waiting for me to come after her. This was a beautiful moment of lighthearted interaction with me and I rejoiced in our growing friendship.

*[FN, April 2019] Good mood today, smiling a lot ("I am talking in slow motion")
Talking a lot with Shabana and others...Jumps out of group (chatting time) to grab bag,
jumps back (joy?) Favorite freeze game (collects/instructs everyone!)*...

Expansive Movements: Becoming Adventurous with Movements

By now, nearly two months of movement sessions with Waheeda and the other children, had provided me with numerous behavioral 'artefacts' indicative of the deep mind-body connection. To me, each interaction in which Waheeda showed signs of engaging actively, of feeling joy, of being socially interactive, of bringing herself to the present moment, was a step toward the possibility of healing, of her well-being. And each of these small steps added up till there came a day when Waheeda became more adventurous with movements. *[VC, April 2019] Running around the whole room freely...priceless! Lots of jumping...smiles, sings...*

At the beginning of session seven, Waheeda seemed more enthusiastic than usual. She stood close to one of the two video cameras set on a tripod, bringing her face directly in front of the lens, as close as possible. She then moved away from the camera, walking around the room, dragging her feet on the carpet, only to return to the camera and repeat the same action over and over. From a distance it looked as though she was scoping out the possibilities of this intriguing gadget, the video camera. At times she talked directly to the camera and then stood behind it to

look through the lens at everyone in the room. Another child joined her and came up with the idea of taking a group picture and Waheeda eagerly gathered everyone to face the camera. Immediately after the group picture, as I was talking with another child, Waheeda announced to me, “I did a cartwheel” Wondering if I had heard her correctly, I requested her to repeat her move, and Waheeda nodded standing in the center of the room. She took off her cardigan and tied it around her waist, making sure her arms had full range of movement (see Figure 4). Then, raising her arms and lifting her right foot off the ground, Waheeda used the momentum and proceeded to do a cartwheel across the center of the room! I stood in bewilderment while she prepared herself for yet another cartwheel, exclaiming with a burst of energy:

“Replay! REEE-playyyy, Ms. Pongkhi! REPLAYY!”

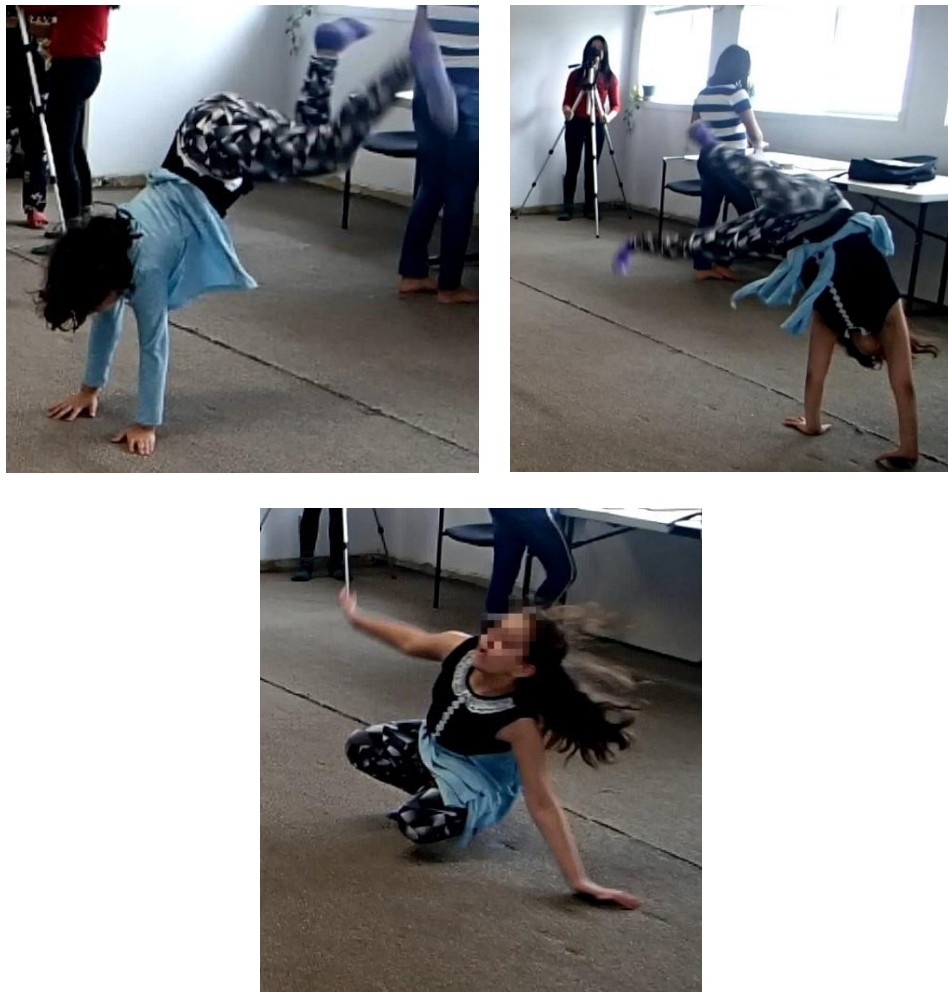
Right after the cartwheels, she began experimenting with the upward facing bow position, as it is commonly known in yoga practice (see Figure 5). Accordingly, she raised her whole body facing the ceiling, pushing against the floor with her palms and her feet. The ease with which she demonstrated this position indicated she had tried it before. Another child eager to try it out joined her, and Waheeda immediately took on an instructor role, correcting the child’s move. There was fluidity in Waheeda’s movements and a remarkable expansion in her movement vocabulary. Among the other children too, there was much social interaction and constant movement in the room. It occurred to me that our weekly sessions had transformed into a vehicle carrying us all on a journey together. And on this day, during session seven, Waheeda was on the driver’s seat taking the rest of us on a ride.

[FN, April 2019] Early today, wide eyes, smiles wide, reaches out/hugs (looks happy today). Hi! (loud clear voice! Nice!). Checks out camera, fascinated for some reason!

Sudden cartwheel (OMG!) Wants me to see! Repeats again and again! (I did not probe, just happened! Wow!)] Full on, wide, across the floor! Yoga position (she's on a roll today!)...;[VC, April 2019] Cartwheel! (out of the blue!) Big, big moment!

Figure 4

Waheeda doing cartwheels



Note. Moving clockwise from top left, the three images show Waheeda doing cartwheels. The top right image shows Waheeda doing a second cartwheel to make sure it is captured on camera, in case her first cartwheel(top left image) did not get recorded. The bottom image shows her landing gracefully.

Figure 5

Waheeda in the upward facing bow yoga position



Note. Waheeda doing a yoga position by herself, in the center of the room, immediately after the cartwheels.

Externalizing the Narrative

As session seven progressed, Waheeda's attention shifted to one of the two video cameras set up with a tripod. On the spur of the moment, she picked up the tripod with the camera still running. She began walking casually around the room with the tripod, as though this was an everyday, mundane behavior. I watched in amusement, wondering if she had a plan. I had a second video camera set up at the other corner of the room, so I took my chances by letting Waheeda play with the first camera. She began swirling the tripod on its legs, flipping the camera upside down and back on top again. She reminded me of a performance artist practicing moves with a staff. However, although she was playing with the camera, Waheeda was careful

with her movements. She never dropped the camera or the tripod. She knew what she was doing. She seemed to be flipping ideas in her mind, just as she continued to flip the tripod back and forth.

Just then, her mother and another parent entered the room to collect their purses. Waheeda walked up to them, holding the tripod above her shoulders, with the camera facing them and announced, “These are our moms.” Then focusing on her mom, she said, “This is my mom, say Hi! I beg you to say Hi!” and as soon as her mom heeded to her, she said, “Now, say Bye!” and her mom said “Byeeee!” and left the room. Waheeda then followed the other parent, focusing the camera on her face this time, repeating, “Say Hi! Say Hi! Please say Hi” and then insisting, “Now, say Bye!!” Clearly the other mother got the hint and looking amused, repeated after Waheeda, “Hii! Byeeee!” and left the room. Waheeda had a pleased look on her face saying, “Everyone said Hi!” and then went on to introduce herself as, “and this is me!”, with her nose almost touching the camera lens! She continued to walk around the room with the camera on the tripod and introduced the rest of the children. When some of the children smiled at the camera, she said cheerfully, “these are the craziest kids in the world!”

And suddenly, the idea she had been forming in her mind while playing with the tripod, took shape. She asked me:

Can you take the camera off? Ms. Pongkhi, can you take the camera off? I want to take it off!

When asked why, she explained that she wanted to walk around with it, without the tripod attached and added, “It’s easier” and I agreed to her request. What unfolded was a remarkable sign of the deep mind-body connection. Waheeda began externalizing her feelings, conveying

her trauma narrative through creative self-expression. In the previous week, I had given a prompt to the children that in the following session everyone would share what they would like me to know about their country Iraq. Waheeda suggested we share by drawing on the white board as we talked. Everyone liked the idea and quickly made their way to the whiteboard, waiting for their turn to share. Waheeda began filming as another child began sharing. They took turns holding the camera until it was Waheeda's turn to share. Waheeda grabbed a marker, and cheerfully began talking:

I was born in November, ummm...November 21st, 2007. This is what happened. When I was a kid, there was a lot of wars...When I was two months old, I started crawling. When I was a year or less, I started walking, I started talking. I got a brother and sister in 2011, I was four and half years old. I always took care of them the most, I always put them on swings, the baby swings. But when I was a baby, I never got a swing.

She drew figures of herself, her siblings (see Figure 6) and her parents to illustrate every scene, and then wiped the board clean for the next scene to be illustrated. Thereby evolved a live pictorial narrative of anecdotal moments of her life. [VC, April 2019] *“Can you take the camera off?” Starts her own filming...*

Figure 6

Waheeda's drawing of herself and her siblings



Note. The first image shows Waheeda when she was two months. The second image shows Waheeda watching over her siblings as they played on swings, during her early childhood in Iraq, before the break of the Civil War in 2014.

Initially, it seemed as though Waheeda was voicing whatever came to her mind in the moment. But I soon realized that she was curating the events to follow a timeline, from birth through her early childhood in Iraq. She described a scene from 2013, when she was with her grandmother, sitting on the bed and watching television in their hotel room, while her parents were outside with her siblings:

My grandma was looking outside (see Figure 7), that's when I heard screaming. I survived two things, I would have been dead, two times, or my mom would have been dead or some other people(muttering). And then I was like this (draws a stick figure with eyes opened wide and brow raised, as though in shock, see Figure 8). When I looked out the window, the first thing I saw was some people dying and stuff, I saw people on the bed, and I saw gunshots everywhere, but I literally did not see my mom and dad anywhere and I told my grandma and she said, "It's okay". She was protecting me. I was young. I did not understand that much...so...

Figure 7

Waheeda with her grandmother in a hotel in Baghdad



Note. Waheeda sitting with her grandmother as she looks out the window and hears gunshots.

Figure 7 and 8 demonstrate the terror that Waheeda faced over five years ago in 2014 and yet continues to be fresh in her mind even now. Her narrative of traumatic experiences found expression in her expanding repertoire of movements, which in turn, have set into motion a visual narrative. This visual narrative was laden with gestures and hand movements, as she drew each scene, verbalizing the sounds and sights.

Figure 8

The shocked look on Waheeda's face



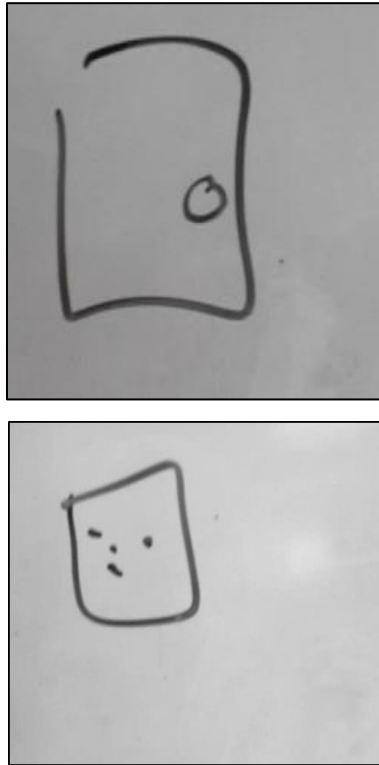
Note. Both images are part of the same drawing made by Waheeda on the whiteboard. In the first image, we notice Waheeda's eyebrows are raised and her hands are covering her mouth in disbelief as she looks out the window. In the second image, we notice the depiction of the scene through the window more clearly. The rectangles indicate hotel beds and other furniture. While drawing the circles, Waheeda said, “*some people dying and stuff, I saw people on the bed.*”

Waheeda continued talking and although the narrative grew increasingly disturbing with factual details, she seemed unperturbed and rather very eager to share:

...and this is what happened. I heard knocking on the door (draws a door, taps on the board four times with her marker pen making four dots while making the sound 'tsshhh tsssh tsssh' with her voice, see Figure 9). And then my mom, my dad, my brother, my sister, they made it. No blood, no nothing (gestures with her hand moving over the two featureless faces she had just drawn to emphasize, see Figure 10). My mom, my dad told us what to do, explain (writes the word 'explain')...after explaining that we have to go outside the door because the window will break, they would have break in the window, so they turn off the lights, so nobody would take them...everyone did (the same) to everyone else. And this is what happened. My mom and dad hold my brother and sister very tightly and my grandma hold on to me, she did not let anyone hurt me (see Figure 11). But I was still focused on the window. Nobody else was looking at the window. I kind of opened the door a little bit to see what happened. I put my head next to the door to hear what happened. I heard a lot of breaking noises. Then I heard footsteps up the stairs (see Figure 12). I thought it was a person with a gun (draws a gun, see Figure 13). But luckily it was a person who was trying to help us. Do you know the person who works in hotels and stuff...he told us to hide, safely, and so he explained (to us) the directions and stuff and this is what happened...luckily my parents survived it.

Figure 9

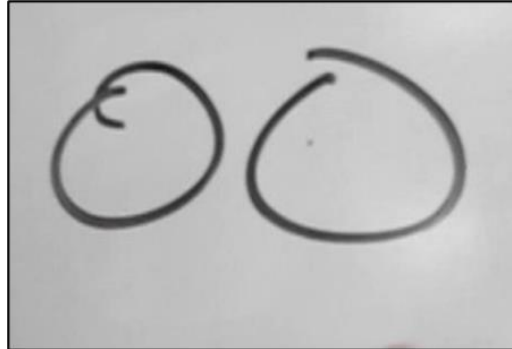
The door of Waheeda's hotel room in Baghdad



Note. The first image shows the door of Waheeda's hotel room in Baghdad where the terrorists attacked. The second image depicts the knocking she heard on this door. She drew four dots to depict the tapping on the door. Waheeda exclaimed, *'I heard knocking on the door!'*

Figure 10

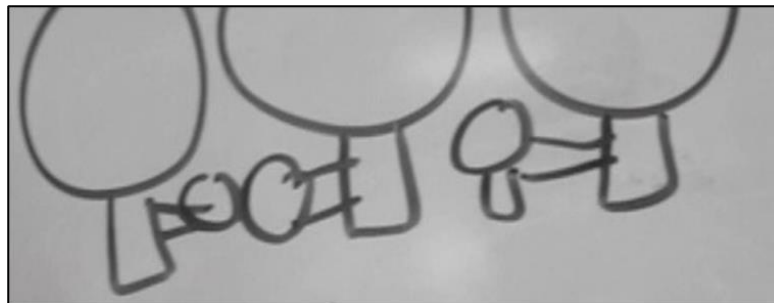
Waheeda's drawing of the uninjured faces of her parents after the attack



Note. Waheeda explained that her parents had no outward signs of physical harm. She said, “No blood, no nothing”. The clear circles represent the faces of her mother and father who made it to her hotel room safely without any signs of blood or injury.

Figure 11

Waheeda's drawing of her parents and grandmother protecting her and her siblings



Note. Waheeda's parents holding her brother and sister, while her grandmother is holding her as the family makes their escape from the hotel. She explained, “My mom and dad hold my brother and sister very tightly and my grandma hold on to me, she did not let anyone hurt me.”

Figure 12

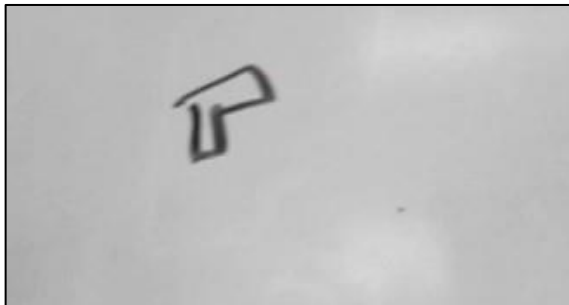
Waheeda's drawing of footsteps



Note. “I heard footsteps up the stairs”, said Waheeda. She drew the dots in succession depicting the path of the footsteps going upstairs to her hotel room.

Figure 13

Waheeda's depiction of a gun



Note. Waheeda was fearful that the person climbing up the stairs to her hotel room was carrying a gun. She exclaimed, “I thought it was a person with a gun!” Fortunately, it was someone who had come to help them.

And then with a thoughtful look on her face, she revisited her memories of the day to reason her own survival:

But me, I will, let me tell you why, how I could have survived it. Because if I stayed in the room, (they) would have saw me, they would have shot the window and it would have broken right? And then the glasses would have got on me. And I will die (speaks very softly, under her breath). But I am young, like, young...

At this point, the other child filming Waheeda asked impatiently, "Is it my turn now because...?" Waheeda responded promptly, "Not yet!" and then raising her own volume, did not let the other child complete the sentence. Waheeda insisted on completing her story, almost running out of breath:

I went to America in 2013, no, 2014. I went to kindergarten.... I went back to my country. I got a baby brother when I was in Arabic school, not this Arabic school. I didn't take care of him. My mom and dad did. Because I had to take care of my brother and sister. I can't take care of three people. Because babies need more attention. And this is what was happening. When I was at school, kind of, the bus, I will draw a bus (giggles she draws), the bus didn't stop! Luckily my grandma was my teacher. She grabbed me out and the bus kept going (see Figure 14). That's when I survived in 2015. And then I came to America again!! (says excitedly). But a lot of people did not like me. I don't know why. Not for me. It's not because of me.

Figure 14

Waheeda's depiction of her school bus which had an accident



Note. Waheeda's school bus that had a brake failure. The two figures inside the bus are Waheeda and her grandmother. Her grandmother managed to pull her out of the bus in time.

Waheeda shared about her narrow escape from the school bus accident, an incident unrelated to the war. Nonetheless, it was an incident that she had disturbing memories of and recalled in vivid detail. The movement and dance sessions seemed to have opened a stream of memories related to traumatic experiences in her childhood.

Waheeda's active and engaged body language as it unfolded during session seven was in stark contrast to session one of the ten movement sessions. In session one, Waheeda's body was tense, as she stood motionless for a long while, holding a marker tightly over the white board, and avoiding eye contact with me. And here was Waheeda, two months later, doing cartwheels, dancing around with the tripod, filming everyone's stories, sharing her traumatic life experiences spontaneously on camera and looking the happiest I had seen her since our very first encounter.

In summary, Waheeda indicated the revival of childhood joys and laughter as demonstrated by her body movements. It appeared that Waheeda was developing an awareness of herself focused in the present. The weekly movement sessions evolved into a safe space allowing Waheeda to feel more at ease with herself. For example, during session one, Waheeda was reluctant to interact with the other children. However, as the sessions progressed through the ten weeks, she began to sit with the other children on the floor without any hesitance, participating in sharing experiences with one another. *[VC, April 2019] Group chatter...totally engaged, all of them together.* Within this collective space, Waheeda found comfort and joy, which translated into her playful movement expressions. Her expansive movements released the muscular tension that was earlier quite prominent in her body language, from her facial expressions to her gestures to her posture. She willingly revisited her past, verbalizing small details of few traumatic events. For example, she shared about a terrorist attack in a hotel in Baghdad, from which she and her family managed to escape unharmed (see Figure 7 through 13). Furthermore, she talked about another incident in which her school bus lost control and her grandmother saved her in time (see Figure 14). She smiled, giggled, talked about her life in Iraq in a matter-of-fact manner, interspersed with mundane details, such as “*my hair was curly then.*”

Waheeda showed ingenuity in sharing her traumatic experiences through expressions using free-flowing movement and drawings (pictorial narrative). Just as she explored the physical space with free-flowing movement, she explored possible other outcomes of the traumatic events. For instance, she said, “*I would have been dead, or my mom would have been dead...*” (see excerpt on p. 73) and “*...if I stayed in the room...And I die*” (see excerpt on p. 79). Through the weekly sessions, Waheeda’s spontaneity found expression in joyful movements suggesting a reconnection with her feelings. Notwithstanding her painful history, she was able to

enjoy herself in the collective space without letting the present be filtered through the unresolved traumas of her past. Before the movement sessions began, Waheeda's detached disposition made me question the value of the movement sessions to her. However, over the course of ten weeks, Waheeda slowly blossomed into a cheerful child, eager to interact with the other children. She began to rejoice in her own movements as her mind and body were learning to listen to each other. Waheeda's active participation in the movement sessions initiated a new conversation between her body and her mind. Moving forward, this dialogue through movement and dance can be instrumental in processing her trauma and thus, promoting her well-being.

Parental Views on the Impact of Movement and Dance Sessions on Waheeda

Waheeda's mother Parveen was one of the most enthusiastic mothers in the study and in the first couple of sessions, she expressed that she would like to remain nearby in case Waheeda was uncomfortable at any point. I supported her need and made space for her to sit in the adjacent room and she dropped in every now and then to observe the activities. At the end of session one, Parveen mentioned that it would be a good idea to arrange for more wholesome food (beyond the snacks I had provided) from the next session onwards as the physical activities were likely to make the children hungry by the end of each session. She offered suggestions on what I could get and from where, given that Waheeda and the other children had food restrictions, pertaining to their religious beliefs and practices.

A week later, at the beginning of session two, as Waheeda walked in looking away from me, Parveen smiled at me and commented, "She told me she had fun last week!" She decided to sit in the adjacent room as in the previous session and I supported her decision. But unlike in session one, Parveen dropped in only twice to observe the activities and was preoccupied talking

to another mother, who wanted to stay as well, while the session was on. During the week leading up to session three, Parveen reached out to me (via text message) to comment that Waheeda had been talking about the activities in session two and was looking forward to the next session. However, when Waheeda arrived at the start of session three, she looked very upset and Parveen took me aside to explain that she had a fight with her in the car, on the way to the session regarding a purchase Waheeda wanted to make which Parveen disapproved. I suggested that if Waheeda wanted to skip the session because she was upset, Parveen can feel free to take her home for the day and there was no need for her to stay if she did not want to. But to my surprise, Parveen felt that Waheeda's participation would be beneficial as the interactions and the activities would help her alleviate her mood. Further, Parveen decided that unlike in session one and two, she would not stay to observe the session and would leave Waheeda with me for the duration of the session. To me, this was an indication of trust and understanding that Waheeda's mother and I were building together.

A month into the sessions, at the end of session four, Parveen commented as she was leaving that Waheeda had been writing and drawing in a notebook at home and talking to herself as she was doing so. I realized that Waheeda was starting a dialogue with herself. Over the next couple of weeks, by the time we completed six of the ten sessions, Waheeda's engagement in the sessions had noticeably increased and Parveen commented on observations she made in her behavior at home. For instance, as Parveen said, "I see she's talking more. She also draws a lot and writes stories, like comics, you know. She wants me to see, read them." Further, Parveen added that Waheeda's mood was less unpredictable in the past few weeks and she seemed more light-hearted. These observations were consistent with Waheeda's behavior during the sessions where her body language was no longer aloof and disengaged. Rather, Waheeda initiated and led

activities and took every opportunity to move around in the room with full abandon, without restricting herself. For example, Waheeda would jump to grab her bag, even though it was right next to her and she could easily reach it without having to jump. When I shared this with Parveen, she laughed and nodded in agreement that she too was noticing a fun, light-hearted nature in her daughter at home, where she was increasingly acting “silly” and goofy with her siblings. Over the next few weeks, from session seven through session nine, Parveen shared more observations with me regarding Waheeda’s behavior at home. She mentioned that Waheeda was preoccupied creating funny TikTok and YouTube videos at home where she would share jokes and make funny faces. Waheeda proudly shared some of these videos with her parents and Parveen was pleasantly surprised at how Waheeda was more active in her interactions at home. Further, Waheeda’s father Atish commented to me at the start of session nine that Waheeda’s schoolteacher and counselor had been noticing changes in Waheeda’s behavior in school. Waheeda’s counselor shared with Atish and Parveen that Waheeda looked happier and more socially interactive in school in the past few weeks. As such, the counselor was eager to learn what activities Waheeda was engaged in during her weekly sessions with me. Besides, Waheeda got into fewer fights in school as conveyed to her parents by her schoolteacher.

Atish and Parveen were visibly elated when they shared that Waheeda thoroughly enjoyed her participation in the activities and was eager to continue with more sessions. Parveen emphasized the impact of the sessions and the changes she observed:

This program, the art and dance and all this stuff make her, say, if she has anxiety or anything she cannot suppress, then the drawing or dancing, all this stuff, help her. If she

feels something, something bad, or something makes her uncomfortable, she will just write it as a story, which was not common earlier. It is sometime difficult for me to understand what she is feeling, she is thinking, you know, but now her mood is not going up and down so much, not like before, now I see she tries to write many stuff. She does that on the weekends, she draws some person, or writes a story, or something. Even with me now, she talks about things.

Atish commented that Waheeda was more forthcoming with friends and acquaintances when they attended social gatherings:

I noticed that, you know, previously when someone tried to talk to her, she, it is, (uh), very hard for her to open up. But recently I have seen that she sometimes goes and talk herself, which is really...it is a new thing for me, Waheeda going to someone and talking. In some event (say) party, usually some family friend or someone will try to talk to her, but she will not speak. But two three times recently, I notice that she is talking which is great! It is hard for her to open up and talk to other people other than me or her mom. Waheeda, she was really very shy and likes to be isolated and not to talk. But right now, I have seen, she went to talk to a friend of mine at a celebration party, she started to talk.

At this point, Parveen reminded Atish of another gathering where Waheeda displayed her playful nature:

Yesterday, at another event, the boys were isolated from the girls and they, one of the boys said to Waheeda, "Oh, it's our space, we don't let girls," and then Waheeda, she came with her phone and recorded some conversation and turned her voice into a boy's voice. And then, played it back to the boys and they then closed the door (laughs). And

then I asked her, "Waheeda, what are you doing?" She said, "I'm trying to joke and prank." Like this kind of thing is new to Waheeda! This is new...and her being afraid, I see she is improving in that sense. She is, playing more and opening up more. That is amazing. You know because it is hard for her, it was really hard for her to do so, to be together with somebody else. Sometimes she prefers to be isolated. But now I see there is a change, which is really great. I wish there is a dance and drawing program for adults! (giggles). We can all just dance, draw!

Atish expressed that Waheeda's participation in the study sessions facilitated the growth of her social skills and addressed her need to express her emotions. Parveen reinstated Atish's views:

In the program, she just feels safe. She does not like to go to school but she wants to go to the program every week! Even from, (uh) last Friday, we have meeting with the school for her, they talk about our kids, and especially Waheeda. And they say, she's so good now and my husband, he told them about the dance and art and what the program is, and the psychologist said, I think she asked him to get your phone number or information, so she can contact you and ask what Waheeda likes, the good things, what Waheeda wants.

CHAPTER IV

SHABANA

She looked furtively around the room, pausing every now and then, as if to focus on her own thoughts. I am uncertain if she is happy to be here for the movement session. Her facial expression belies any emotion except a glint in her eyes.

[FN, March 22 2019]

Figure 15

Self-portrait of Shabana



Child and Family Background

Shabana is a seven-year old Iraqi refugee child who lives on the west coast of the United States with her parents and two younger siblings. She was born in Iraq and her family moved to the United States in 2016. Shabana's father, Naseer, worked with the U.S. Army as an interpreter. Having lived in an unstable political climate his whole life, he was eager to contribute toward a peaceful future for his motherland Iraq. He began working as an independent contractor in 2008 and shortly after, moved to a full-time position with the U.S. Army:

I used to work with the US Army back in Iraq and that kind of job, (umm), ...caused risks for my family and for me. Actually, as a young person at that time, I was looking for a change in my country and then, I was willing to risk it to make this change happen. The politicians are corrupt, encouraging people to kill and embrace hate, so we were all very disappointed, having lived our whole life under the regime. And after 2003 (Iraq War²), we hoped to make Iraq like other successful countries in the Middle East.

In 2010, faced with the dangers involved in maintaining any liaison with Americans on Iraqi soil, Naseer considered the possibility of moving to another country. To explore the scope of this possibility, he moved alone to India for a couple of years and then to Turkey for another year, while visiting his wife in Iraq occasionally. He mentioned that his physical absence from Iraq protected him, especially after the withdrawal of the U.S. Army in 2011: *“Just to keep me safe because, you know, it’s not secured any more after the withdrawal of the Army. And especially for people like me who have been labeled as American agents or whatever, just because of our job, despite the fact that we really served our country!”* Naseer expressed gratitude for his wife

² U.S. forces invade Iraq in 2003 to overthrow Iraq's leadership (Council on Foreign Relations [CFR], 2020).

explaining that she was very supportive and always encouraged him to act in his best interests, so that he would be safe. In 2013, Naseer moved back to Iraq to be with his wife and their baby daughter Shabana. His anxiety over their safety heightened due to new government policies in Iraq and motivated him to apply to move with his family to the United States:

The Iraqi government asked the U.S. Army to name whoever worked with them, local interpreters, social advisors, media advisors, whoever...contractors...they said, "you must give us access to these names and information." I quit immediately! I didn't waste even a single day. I told them (U.S. Army), "No more! Safety was a big concern because I have seen other friends who have been killed. So, I made the decision to apply for a visa. I could no longer stay in Iraq and I applied to relocate after the withdrawal of the Army.

As Naseer talked about his mixed emotions over the decision to leave his own country to find safety in a foreign land, he expressed his frustration over the extended delay in processing their visas:

I applied in 2013 under the International Organization for Migration (IOM) program for refugees. Every year I get an email that it is still in process! At the end of 2015, I got my first interview and then the second one in 2016. It's complicated because once you have worked with the Army, it means you are trained to use weapons and these things make it more difficult for the U.S. Government to accept us! But actually, my work, I was only a civilian in the unit. I did not use weapons and I didn't get any training in combat. But even then, it's complicated! We are targeted in Iraq by the terrorist and then we are

suspected when we apply for visas! So, it took longer to see everything on our background check, you know, the security checks for U.S. Government.

Life in Iraq

Shabana lived with her mother and maternal grandparents in Iraq, until the age of one. She had the company of her father's large extended family, including seven uncles and six aunts. In the period between 2010 - 2013, while Naseer was away from Iraq, his eldest brother supported Shabana's family financially, whenever the situation demanded it. Naseer reiterated how he was especially grateful to his wife Salma for her support, during his absence from Iraq:

I was really supported and it's tough for my wife because I wasn't there. That's the thing, my wife is the one, who, I feel suffered more than me because she was taking care of our daughter...and the kind of society that we live in there, it's not easy for her to do that.

When the Civil War started in 2014 in Iraq, Shabana was two years of age. Gradually, the violence spread across the country. By 2015, news of daily violence and deaths became the norm. And soon, the bloodshed and danger moved to their hometown, including an explosion right next door. Naseer described the dangerous social climate during the time:

In terms of safety, there were multiple times when we faced difficulties. There was a time when there was an explosion next to our house. Everybody was terrified. And you know, you are naturally concerned about the safety of your kids and your own. Especially during that time, starting 2014, the ISIS took over some parts of Iraq and then they kept coming from those parts to our provinces. They did not control our provinces, but they kept sending suicide bombers and all these car bombs. It was terrifying at that time for

everyone. Whenever you would go outside, there could be car bombs and you did not know, if you will come back...these kinds of feelings, it's not easy to handle! Being concerned about your safety in every single minute! I would go outside, which is necessary. After all, you cannot imprison yourself inside the house and there was no online shopping there.

Shabana along with her one-year old sister Aliya, grew up against this backdrop of carnage (see Figure 16). Naseer empathized with his daughters for the challenging circumstances in which they found themselves in their early childhood:

The children, they were very young then, but they just take it all in.... sometimes, the sound of weapons and...they have difficult time remembering that. Even the TV itself, it's just too much to handle for them, you know. For me and my wife, we watched the television because we were interested in knowing what is going on and how can we prepare, manage our own security. But kids are watching too, they know what is going on. Say, if you are watching the weather news and then suddenly they show people killed and some minister will come on screen and then the reporter will say, "*this family has lost this, this and this*" and I think it's really toxic especially for kids. I feel sorry for the reality that my kids faced.

Shabana had started attending preschool for a couple of months till her parents decided to stop her schooling due to the dangerous situation. Naseer explained:

We wanted to let her be with peers, but we couldn't handle it after two months and quit sending her to school because the buses that took the children to school and got them

back home were not secure either. We were not able to feel assured about her safety even though it was a private preschool.

Figure 16

Timeline of key events in Shabana’s life

<u>Year</u>	<u>Event</u>
2019	<p>● Seven-year-old Shabana participates in the weekly movement and dance sessions. During the researcher’s home visit and session one, Shabana was careful to conceal any display of emotion on her face and her body language conveyed fatigue</p> <hr/> <p>Six-year old Shabana continues to struggle with occasional nightmares and is extremely sensitive emotionally</p>
2018	<p>● Shabana’s family welcome their newborn son Aamir. Shabana now has two younger siblings, Aliya and Aamir. She is extremely fond of them and loves playing with them</p> <hr/> <p>Shabana joins a local school in a suburb in the Pacific Northwest where the family resides. Her parents notice that she is overly emotional and cries easily. Besides, she has occasional but intense nightmares</p>
2016	<p>● At the age of four, Shabana moves to the United States permanently with her parents and younger sister</p> <hr/> <p>★ Terrorists invaded her hometown in Iraq. Two-year old Shabana was exposed to mass violence (suicide bombings, car bombs, gunshots) recurrently. Besides, the graphic and persistent media coverage of the killings provoked anxiety in Shabana</p>
2014	<p>● The visa processing takes an inordinate amount of time. Shabana’s family wait for three years (2012 – 2015), to get their immigration visa interview appointment during which time the Civil War breaks out in Iraq</p> <hr/>
2012	<p>● In early 2012, Shabana’s father Naseer applies for special immigration visas at the American Embassy in Iraq, to move with his family to the United States</p>

The Naseer Family Move to the United States

In September 2016, at the age of four years, Shabana moved to the United States with her parents, sister Aliya and toddler brother Aamir. Naseer and Salma expressed their relief at being able to travel together to the United States with their children. Naseer said smiling, “*We had the interview and the fingerprints and everything together. We came together. That’s the thing that we are grateful for.*” Upon arrival, a Jewish Family service center on the west coast of the United States, reached out to the family helping them with their housing and providing furniture. Naseer explained:

Everyone among the Iraqis who worked for the U.S. mission through the IOM program, they come through an organization, they connect them (the Iraqis) to an organization that can support them. It’s not by choice but they pick for you. Because I picked this area (west coast), so they must connect me to an organization here. The Jewish family service center was very helpful because they make us aware of how everything here in the United States is like, what life is like here, because everything was new to us at that time.

Although, I learned some tips, had some idea from my work with the U.S. Army in Iraq, it was not enough. Coming here from Iraq, it’s just...it’s not a simple move. It’s a big move, especially, if you have a family. When you travel with kids, you have bigger commitments and many more concerns.

After a couple of months, Naseer and Salma connected with an Iraqi organization for refugees and gradually expanded their social community. Inspired by others in his Iraqi community in the United States, Naseer and Salma began classes in English as a second language (ESL). Once

Naseer received his ESL certification, he joined a community college for a bachelor's degree.

Naseer expressed pride in their strength during adversity:

These tough situations teach you to be stronger and to face whatever challenges that you have. Life here in United States is not easy either, we are starting here from scratch. But we feel better because we see our kids are safe and they have the opportunity to grow in a normal situation unlike before. This is very comforting to me and my wife despite all the new challenges we face here. Right now, I am the only one working and although we are doing fine, it's not that financially stable. I am doing the best I can. I am doing my bachelors' in Information Technology and am hopeful to finish my studies within a few months. I am taking an overload of courses!

Naseer found employment at a non-profit organization in 2017. At the time of the study, he worked full-time at his day job and attended evening classes at a community college. Both Naseer and Salma volunteer at their local community center where they meet other refugee families once a month, over a community lunch. Over the past few years, Shabana has made new friends through these community gatherings.

Getting to Know Shabana

Shabana has a caring and responsible father who takes genuine interest in learning about his daughter's day-to-day experiences. He takes pride in Shabana and when asked to describe her, he responded happily, with a wide grin on his face:

Oh, she is lovely, you know...she's social and she likes stories, she loves them. She has a big kind of imagination, which I really like. Sometimes she tells me stories that make me really surprised. I learn from her imagination.

Naseer noted that Shabana primarily enjoys telling stories in English displaying her proficiency in the language. According to Naseer, Shabana's growing proficiency in English is praiseworthy since she spoke no English when she moved to the United States in 2016. He mentioned that this sentiment was echoed by her elementary school teacher who marveled at Shabana's language skills. To further support her language skills and to encourage her love for stories, Naseer regularly purchases storybooks in English for Shabana. Naseer added that she often astonished him and his wife by the speed with which she finished reading a book. In addition to reading and telling stories, Shabana enjoys drawing and playing with her little sister Aliya and brother Aamir.

Exposure to the Civil War in Iraq (2014 - 2017)

Shabana witnessed the horror of the Civil War in Iraq, at the tender age of two years. In her hometown, the sounds of guns and suicide bombs and vivid media coverage of the killings became a part of her everyday life for two years, from 2014 through 2016. This reality of witnessing the daily incidence of widespread violence and turmoil during her early years continues to effect Shabana's young mind. Naseer admits the difficulty he and his wife face in convincing Shabana that they are now safe in their new home in the United States:

It's a big challenge for us to just be able to comfort her and get her to forget about these things. These things are not appropriate for kids. We try telling her everything is okay now, to get her to forget. But it's not easy for her, because it's still there. Kids keep them in their memories

Emotional Sensitivity. According to her parents, Shabana is very emotional and is predisposed to feeling hurt easily. She struggles with her vulnerability and is frequently overwhelmed by her emotions. Naseer elaborated on her emotional susceptibility saying:

Sometimes we feel that she is over emotional, and, in a way, I think it's justified because of the whole thing that she has seen as a child! Why I am saying that is because every single thing that happens to her, she is not able to easily forget about them. Sometimes she cries a lot if somebody just hurts her feelings. She is unable to cope with emotions, emotional stress or whatever, you know...she is really over emotional in that sense. Many times, I don't know what's going on. When I speak to her, she cries sometimes. And that's because somebody told her something or some of her friends did this or that, which is not a big deal. But at the same time, she takes it in this way. She's sensitive but I feel it's not weird because of the changes that she has experienced. The differences between the two countries and the traumatic experience that she had there (in Iraq). Her behavior is justified...I am trying to help her with that.

Sleep Disturbances and Occasional Nightmares. Shabana reads late into the night in bed until she falls asleep naturally. She has difficulty sleeping due to occasional nightmares which leave her petrified and speechless. Naseer voiced his concern over her sleep disturbances:

Sometimes she cannot sleep in her room because she is afraid. This is one thing that I am really trying to figure out how I can support her. But it's not consistent. It's just sometimes. She says to me, "*I have a dream, I have a dream of something*" and I tell her, "*Baba, we are here, we are safe here, there's nothing to bother you here*" Some nights she comes and wakes me up and says, "*I am scared, I need to stay next to you.*"

Every time Shabana has nightmares, she runs to her parent's room. Some nights she sleeps with them while on other nights her father accompanies her back to her room and sits with her for a while to comfort her. Shabana shares her bedroom with sister Aliya, who has nightmares as well but of much lesser intensity and quite infrequently. Shabana has been fighting her nightmares over the past few years, since they moved to the United States in 2016. Naseer communicated:

She doesn't like to talk about it but when I see her face, she is really terrified and I am so concerned about it, but I don't know what to do with that! But recently, it is getting better since she is growing up. She has better sleep. But although it's less frequent now, the intensity is the same. It's really intense...I see that she's really terrified, and I don't know how that happens. I don't know what is the trigger for that. I always keep the light on in the room and I always encourage her to read a story (before going to sleep). That's a good practice that I keep encouraging her to do but it (the nightmares) can still happen.

Naseer mentioned that he makes a concerted effort to find books which have stories of emotional strength:

I frequently buy stories that are her age level and are engaging and give her some psychological support. I look for stories that create a kind of good atmosphere and she is always reading them, always. Almost every day, she sleeps with the books next to her.

Shabana's Initial Encounter with the Researcher

On my home visit, Shabana greeted me at the door with sister Aliya peeping behind her. Shabana was smiling but rather shyly as she led me to the living room couch. During my conversation with her parents, Shabana moved in and out of the living room, observing me from different corners of the room. At times she sat on the couch, next to her father. Shabana hid her curiosity by putting on a straight face but her eye gaze and her body language revealed it. At

some point, I must have cleared her ‘screening’ since she began talking with me, eagerly displaying her recent drawings. Sensing my enthusiasm, she ran into her bedroom to share her older drawings, from kindergarten. Standing right next to me, she described each drawing, as she flipped through the pages of the drawing book. Once, she pointed at a school assignment where she drew watches (inspired by ‘The Persistence of Memory’³), and explained, “*some drawings are realistic, some are unrealistic*”. Shabana surprised me with this noteworthy insight. Her understanding of art combined with her playful use of colors and shapes, and her love for stories was an indicator of Shabana’s deep inner emotional landscape.

The Movement Sessions with Shabana

Following is a discussion of the observations during the ten movement and dance sessions with Shabana.

Body Language

In session one, Shabana reached the studio with her sister Aliya much earlier than the other children. She greeted me with an easy smile as her eyes looked around the room, full of curiosity. She was familiar with the rooms in the community center as her family regularly joins other Iraqi families for ESL classes and weekly lunches at this location. However, on this day, she seemed to be looking for clues in the room to the activities planned for the day. Her eyes lit up as she noticed me setting up two video cameras on tripods. Learning that everybody in the room would be captured on video, she followed me around offering to help me adjust the angle

³ Surrealist artist Salvador Dalí’s famous work called ‘The Persistence of Memory’ made in 1931 (Museum of Modern Art [MoMA], 2020).

of the cameras. Soon after, the rest of the children poured in and the session began with a round of informal introductions. Shabana took particular interest in writing down her favorite things on the whiteboard. She was quick to find a marker pen and while writing, she recited her list of things aloud, making sure I had both heard and seen her list. As the session progressed, Shabana continued to participate in the activities, from warm-up through the movement exercises. However, although she displayed no outward hesitation, her level of enthusiasm was lukewarm overall. She moved slowly around the room, sometimes dragging her feet, as though carrying considerable weight on her shoulders. She was treading with care at the beginning of the session. She was curious but tried to keep her emotions under check, as she surveyed the room. She moved slowly and decisively as though she had a lot on her mind, and she was taking her time to think through her thoughts. However, halfway through session one, she let her guard down a little. She stopped to look at herself at the two wall mirrors in the room. While she was observing herself, few of the other children began playing music on my phone connected to the speaker. Shabana continued to look at herself in the mirror, momentarily oblivious of the presence of everyone else in the room. Then moving away from the mirrors and facing the opposite wall, she began swaying from side to side, in tune with the music, without looking at anyone. Her younger sister Aliya rushed to join her (see Figure 17). Aware of her sister's presence but not looking at her directly, Shabana's movements became more expansive. She was energized by the company of her sister. Standing on one foot, she swiveled round and round (see Figure 18). She moved to the music, taking graceful steps, while her sister imitated her. Shabana demonstrated a steady flow of natural movement, ending her performance at the end of the song with a pose. Gradually, her reticence was giving way to uninhibited movement expressions. *[FN, March 2019] She smiles shyly at me, eyes scanning the room. I think she is curious...*

Figure 17

Shabana and sister Aliya dancing together



Note. Sisters Shabana and Aliya enjoying their dance together while looking at themselves in the wall mirror.

Figure 18

Shabana dancing gracefully



Note. The image on the left depicts Shabana focusing on her move while the image on the right shows her dancing around the room freely.

The Mind-Body Connection: Narrative of Gestures and Movement

In session two, Shabana joined the other children as we gathered in a circle on the floor. The children began responding to my prompt, “How was your week?” as “it was good” or “it was bad” and took turns sharing their experiences. One child, qualifying her week as a bad one, expressed uncertainty over whether it was going to get better anytime soon. Shabana

immediately reacted to her, while looking at me, “*you never know what happens in the future! Nobody has future vision.*” Shabana’s voice was laden with emotion and she had a sad expression on her face. She was bouncing an inflated yellow ball on her lap (see Figure 19) and as the conversation continued in the group, there was gentle but constant movement in her body. When it was her turn to share about her week, Shabana’s verbal narration was accompanied by hand gestures (see Figure 20):

The only bad times I have are basically at school! The only reason I don't like school is...there is this girl named Tyesha, she used to be my friend but now she's like... (*aah huh*) she’s like a 'fake' friend! Because she loved me and now, she's being all rude about it! All she did now is, she started the drama, every new person that is good, she turns them into a sassy person. All girls are rude now, almost every girl has been hypnotized by her, they want to be with you more, you know what I mean (by hypnotized)?

Shabana was evidently quite disappointed with her friend Tyesha. Her annoyance was conveyed through the heightened tone in her voice, the narrowing of her eyes with the tips of her eyebrows touching. Her hands moved from an inward to an outward motion, starting from her heart and then moving outwards, conveying the intensity of her feelings about the situation in school. Shabana’s gestures complemented her narrative while the balloon bounced in the air and she would catch it at the end of every sentence, almost as a figurative punctuation mark (see Figure 21). [VC, March 2019] *My bad times in school...a 'fake' friend...complains about the girl she doesn't like...*

By the time we were in session four, Shabana's communication through movement, gestures and facial expressions continued to increase steadily. For instance, in session four, she spontaneously started exploring the space through free-flowing movement, right in the middle of the room, with no music playing. I was reminded of the contrast in her body language in previous sessions where Shabana's posture was reminiscent of carrying a heavy weight on her shoulders, suggesting her body was holding an implicit narrative. But over the course of four sessions, Shabana no longer dragged her feet while walking, her gait was noticeably lighter, and she became talkative. Shabana communicated with her whole body, using movement, dance, gestures, facial expressions, and verbal language.

*[FN, March 2019] Sitting on the floor, close to me (good sign!) Other kids talk and share but Shabana mostly listening. Then yellow ball, starts gesturing (doesn't like friend).
Body: nodding, smiling to herself...*

Figure 19

Shabana bouncing a yellow ball



Note. Shabana gently moving her body as she bounces a ball while talking with the other children.

Figure 20

Shabana gesturing with her hands during circle time



Note. Shabana talking about her past week with the other children, using gestures and facial expressions while speaking.

Figure 21

Shabana's hand gestures



Note. Shabana accompanying her verbal narration with hand gestures.

Shabana conveyed a sense of joy and playfulness through her movements and was often brimming with excitement (see Figure 22). At one point during session four, Shabana walked up to me while I was adjusting one of the video cameras mounted on a tripod at the back of the room. Shabana suggested which way I should tilt the camera by gesturing with her hand. Shortly after, I stepped aside letting her adjust the height and angle. Clearly, she had something on her mind and was carefully deliberating while looking through the camera lens, until she was satisfied with the angle. Then, she picked a spot in the center of the room facing the camera and asked me, “*Can you see me?*” When I nodded, she gestured a ‘thumbs up’ and began swinging her arms back and forth slowly, gently moving her hips till her whole body started swaying synchronously to an internal rhythm. Shabana, centered in the moment, engaged her whole body in this spontaneous composition, smiling happily. Toward the end of session four, Shabana made another display of gestures to communicate her dislike for the “bullies” at school. She moved her right palm left to right facing outward, as though wiping something in the air with her teeth slightly clenched, expressing her disapproval. Once again, her gestures and facial expression complemented her narrative.

[VC, March 2019] jumps happily, adjusting the camera angle, “move it, just a bit. You see me?” (then she does a twist dance).

Figure 22

Shabana's joyful and playful movements



Note. Shabana dancing happily and displaying her emotions through facial expressions.

Laughter, Playfulness and Creative Self-Expression

A month and a half into the sessions, Shabana's movements became more and more playful. Her movements were often accompanied and sometimes preceded by a joke. For instance, in session five, she insisted on telling a joke before the activities. Raising her hand to draw my attention, she said, "*I know a joke! What's a teacher called who drinks tea? a Teaaa-cher!*" Shabana enacted drinking an imaginary cup of tea, raising her cup and bringing it close to her mouth. After sharing the joke, Shabana continued to move her hands and body, exploring the natural rhythm inside her. She lifted both arms in the air, spread her fingers and then began swinging her hips in synchrony with her hand movements.

In another instance, at the beginning of session six, Shabana balanced herself on one toe and then flipped her ponytail, playfully moving her body while singing, "*Imaginary pony...I have an imaginary ponytail!*" Although she did have a real ponytail, it did not swing side to side on its own as it was tied low on her neck. Shabana was becoming more aware of movements all around her. Since most of the other children had not yet arrived, the room was quite empty. Realizing this, she took the opportunity to run across the room exclaiming, "*Look! We have so much space!*". While running across the room, she noticed a zig-zagged line on the carpet (possibly created by dirt). This discovery set her imagination on fire! She announced, "*We have a trail, do you see the trail?*" and without waiting for anyone's response, she playfully danced along the path of the imaginary trail, from one end of the room to the other. And then sat down on a chair in the room with a rotating seat, spinning herself round and round. To keep the momentum, she pushed her hand against a table, every time she would come a full circle. In this manner, Shabana found creative ways to move and to express herself.

[FN, April 2019] So many gestures, hands moving all the time. School story (chat time), big eyes, wide smiling. Runs across floor, covers lot of ground. Does not tire, adds to playlist (favorites on phone). Dances centerstage, two children join her. Happy today, giggles, smiles, shares.

Animated Imagination. During circle time in the session six, sitting on the floor, she declared to all of us, "*I forgot to share one of my jokes*". She proceeded to enact her joke, using her body to complement the narrative. Standing in the middle of the circle, she drew out a tiny piece of paper which she had colored green and cut out in the shape of a green pea. With a hint of excitement in her voice, she said, "*I dropped the pea, I pea-d on the floor! See, it's a pea!*"

while letting the paper fall down on the floor. Then, she imitated the motion of the green pea falling, by moving her body side to side while lowering herself to the floor. Shabana's movements were as graceful as an autumn leaf swaying and falling from a tree.

Shabana seemed to have uncovered an endless reservoir of jokes within herself and insisted on sharing yet another joke. Noticing my absence from the circle as I momentarily stepped aside to adjust one of the cameras, she announced loud and clear, "*Okay I have one more joke, Miss Pongkhi, I have one more joke I realized I never even talked about.*" Shabana waited patiently for me to return to the circle. As soon as I rejoined, she raised her right arm high in the air, as though delivering a public speech and asked, "*Where did French fries come from in the first place? The Friennn-d, you have Friend and you have French*" Although the joke was somewhat unclear to me other than a play of words, Shabana was delighted at her own delivery and repeated the joke, while tapping her folded hands shoulder to shoulder to stress on the words "*friend*" and "*French*" Shabana was expanding her repertoire of movement and using movement to complement her verbal expressions in creative ways.

Toward the end of session six, Shabana found an oval shaped toy in the room. Her imagination fired up immediately. She held the toy like a flower to the side of her head, smiling and dancing with her feet tapping on the floor. And then an idea crossed her mind making her eyes grow bigger. Shabana used the toy as a make-believe lightbulb and placing it atop her head, bursts out excitedly, "*I have an idea!*" Shabana danced around the room with the toy, reaching Waheeda and placing the toy lightbulb close to her forehead (see Figure 23) and said, "*You have an idea too!*" Finally, Shabana's animated movements brought her to me. Bursting with laughter,

she placed the lightbulb on my head and declared, “*O look! And you have an idea too!*” Shabana amazed me with her delightful imagination animated by her growing repertoire of movements.

Figure 23

Shabana placing the make-believe lightbulb on Waheeda’s forehead



Note. Shabana illustrating that Waheeda has “*an idea too!*”

Movement Becomes Dance. By session seven Shabana skillfully turned any mundane activity into a rhythmic movement, with or without the accompaniment of music (see Figure 24). For example, in session seven, grinning naughtily, she asked me, “*Can we dayyyynncee?*” Waheeda, who happened to be standing next to her, looked confused as she didn’t understand what Shabana was talking about. Shabana giggled and repeated with an even wider grin, “*let’s Dayyynncee!*” and Waheeda repeated after her, “*O, let’s dance!*” Shabana ran to the wall mirrors and prepared for a dance move, looking at the mirror with pure concentration. Soon after, she

began dancing with her feet kicking backwards and her hands following the rhythm of her feet. Waheeda was intrigued and joined her but was unable to duplicate Shabana's exact steps. She asked Shabana, "how do you do it?" at which Shabana patiently taught the steps to Waheeda. Within a few minutes, the two children were dancing together (see Figure 25).

[FN, April 2019] music on/off, doesn't matter! (she will dance!) Naughty smile, silly jokes (continue on), giggles. Easy, wide, relaxed (body moves). Giggles, giggles.

Figure 24

Shabana dancing by herself



Note. The first image shows Shabana dancing across the floor. The second image shows her focusing on her move while facing the wall mirror.

Figure 25

Shabana and Waheeda exploring dance together



Note. In the first image (left) Shabana is teaching Waheeda the dance moves. In the second image (right) Waheeda joins Shabana and tries the move herself.

In summary, the ten movement and dance sessions provided Shabana a platform to share her experiences with the other children which enabled her to develop a sense of camaraderie with them. The demure and hesitant Shabana began to take ownership of the space, filling it up with her delightful laughter and playfulness. At the beginning of the movement sessions, Shabana's father had informed me during my home visit, that his daughter "*does not dance*". However, over the course of the ten sessions, Shabana revealed the natural rhythm in her body. She began communicating her emotional states through sensory expressions, through the narratives of gestures, movement and dance. Her powerful imagination was animated by her self-initiated movements and spontaneous dance sequences. Gradually, her jaded body language melted away and she conveyed a sense of freedom and ease.

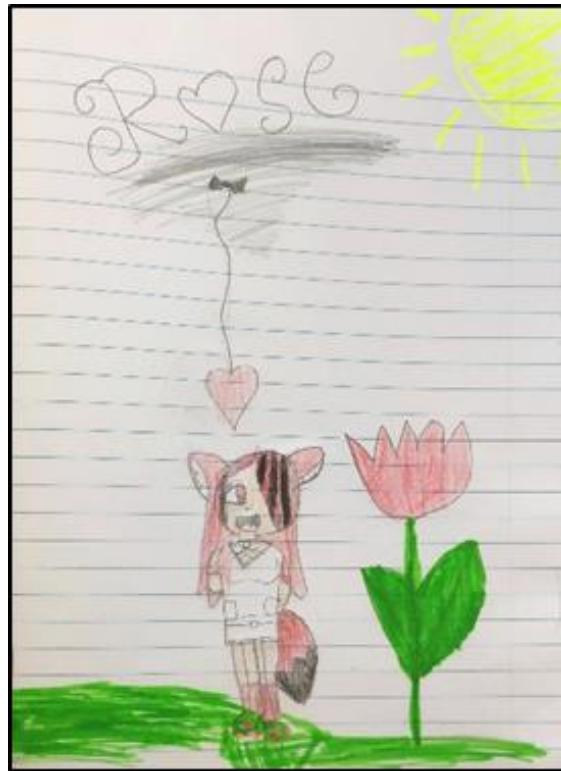
Shabana developed a greater ability to connect with the other children and to me through her nonverbal expressions. She communicated her thoughts and feelings with confidence, allowing her spontaneity to thrive. Further, she was cognizant of the needs of the other children, engaging them in conversations as well as choreographing short dance sequences for them to learn and dance together. She developed these dance sequences spontaneously and her joyfulness added a lively atmosphere to the movement and dance sessions.

Despite her traumatic experiences, it was wonderful to watch Shabana reignite her lighthearted spirit. She used facial expressions to compliment her jokes and impromptu stories. Her playfulness and love for jokes added a sprightly character to her verbal and sensory narratives. Her laughter was contagious, entertaining everyone in the room, till all the children were rolling in peals of laughter. Figure 26 is a good example of Shabana's sense of humor and

playfulness. So is the following description she shared of herself with a look of pure mischief in her eyes: “*When I was small, I was so cute, so extremely cute, I got away with everything!*”

Figure 26

Self-portrait of Shabana with a rose



Note. Shabana juxtaposes her self-portrait with a pink rose. However, the label ‘Rose’ clearly points at her, while she herself is looking at the rose, and a bright yellow sun is shining above. This drawing illustrates her playful character complete with a bushy foxtail and big fox ears and reflects the complexity of her thought process.

Parental Views on the Impact of Movement and Dance Sessions on Shabana

Shabana's father Naseer was very forthcoming with his views on the study sessions, regularly chatting with me either at the start or at the end of sessions. Naseer and his wife Salma were always the first family to arrive for each session with their daughters Shabana and Aliya. Being the first to reach every week, the family assisted me in setting the room so the session could begin on time. At the beginning of session one, Naseer informed me that he and his wife would be shopping at a nearby location and would be within easy reach, should I need any assistance. The following week, at the end of session two, Salma briefly chatted with me indicating that Shabana had been excited about attending the session. Although Shabana did not express her enthusiasm verbally during session two, her eyes displayed curiosity, and she participated in every activity.

At the beginning of session three, as Naseer was dropping off Shabana, he commented that Shabana talked about "how much fun she had" at the last session playing with everyone and she and her sister were waiting excitedly all week for Saturday(the day of the weekly sessions). This feedback was very encouraging to me and was consistent with my observations of Shabana during session three where she played music on my phone and danced around the room. The following week, Salma shared with me, as they were leaving at the end of session four, that Shabana had been making funny faces and sharing silly jokes on their way to the session in the car. I noticed that Shabana and Aliya were giggling even as they got back in the car with their parents, on their way home. Over the next couple of weeks, by the time we completed six of the ten sessions, Naseer and Salma discussed with me small but noticeable changes in Shabana's behavior at home. Shabana did not get into fights at school in the past couple of weeks (as conveyed to them by her teacher) and when at home, she seemed more cheerful and talkative

than usual. During week eight, leading up to session eight, Naseer briefly chatted with me over the phone and shared that Shabana was full of jokes and laughter at home and joined Aliya in dancing around the house. He mentioned that this was something new to him as earlier he believed that Shabana did not like to dance and it was his younger daughter Aliya alone who was fond of dancing. And at the onset of the last session, that is, session ten, Naseer and Salma mentioned to me that Shabana continued to be talkative at home and was spurning out jokes endlessly, bursting with laughter often with her sister. Their feedback resonated with my observations of Shabana's behavior in the sessions where she was full of giggles and smiled and laughed easily.

During the post study informal interview with Shabana's parents at home, Naseer expressed his belief that the study sessions were beneficial to Shabana and supported the social needs of the rest of the children as well. He commented:

I believe that, (um), the program went, excellently- everything was amazing because I, honestly, I did not expect kid's reactions to be this way. She waits for every week; she will wait for the Saturday to come, to go to your program. And then the activities are really fun for all the children. At that same time, I see, Shabana learned a lot. She learned (about) being together in a better way. This kind of social skills I've seen it developed in a way. I don't know how to describe that, but I noticed that change, between her and the other kids, they are, they are better friends right now. I believe, during our community meeting, the monthly meeting that I have told you about. There were, more troubles in terms of being together you know, socially, the children they exhibit, some kind of challenging behavior among them. But now it is - I see it is less frequent. Shabana has a better relationship, it is better understanding. Even last night, we were together in the

center, there were over twenty kids. And then the group that were in your program, they were all together. I was surprised, we did not have much problems with them. You know, the others were running or screaming, or they do not know what to do. But, these kids, they were, talking to each other in a better way. I noticed that there is a change...thanks to your program, actually.

And right now, Shabana has a better relationship with them, that is what I feel...yeah, in terms of result, this is, a great result that I have seen. She has a better understanding of other's needs. It is hard with kids, to have them be together because each one of them maybe will want to do something and the others want to do other (things), so there are conflicts. Conflicts and, you know, problems happening. But it is less frequent these days. Shabana, I have seen she is talking more to others, which is really great. I really appreciate the way she came together last night with the other kids, they were separated, their own group. Like a group, that much of relationship is really an achievement, which is really cool.

Furthermore, Naseer emphasized that the sessions supported Shabana's ability to manage her emotions and build closer relationships with other children:

And your program, even if it is a kind of little step, you see there is an improvement in actual life. Kid's behavior getting to be better, behave in a better way. They will be more social, emotionally they will be more confident in that sense. That is what I love about the program. Especially in our culture, and in general, immigrants and refugee kids, they are not used to the social context here because in our countries, it is different. Here the kids need to be, let's say, more organized in their behavior. And kids here differ from our

kids. Shabana, the situation that she was in, that she went through, a dramatic experience affected her, and there are challenges she faces.

And Shabana has strong opinions. And when she is with others, people, friends who also have the same thing, like strong opinions, with Waheeda and Sidra (one of the eight children in the study), she did not get along with them. But now, I also noticed that yesterday (at our community event), she is closer to Waheeda, which is really, um, great. How did they get over their own opinions...and (then) coming along together. That is one thing that I see as a result of the program because now they see each other's needs. That is amazing, being responsible like that.

Naseer reiterated that the children in general seemed to be more attuned to each other's needs after the study sessions and added that Shabana had not had any nightmares in the previous couple of months:

They understand each other better way, in a better way, so that's a great, that's a great thing, you know. It is true, it is a big result actually. I notice things and especially with my daughters. So that is why I feel this way. This is really great, it is working, you know. I tried a lot with Shabana whenever she is having a hard time, with others...I tried different strategies, different things, to talk about it. But now, I have seen it happening, which is really great. She needs to learn these kinds of strategies which is really effective, but you don't know which kind of strategy clicks with the kids. And also, I actually, frankly speaking, I do not see any, I haven't seen it (Shabana's nightmares) recently, in the last couple of months, and I think, at least I can say confidently that it's less now. Being active is really one thing that I always push for and I see she moves from here to

there at home, running around all the more...I'm looking always for these kind of programs for the kids because, frankly speaking, I feel the community (Iraqi families) is a little bit isolated on their own.

Naseer and Salma concluded the conversation by providing me suggestions for future sessions and highlighting the need for similar programs in their community. Naseer advised:

Personally, I think, you will need a kind of personal assistant because even teachers need teacher assistants. In your program, because it's more flexible, it is open for the kids, so they behave in a way that's more liberal for them. So, having someone to assist you, a friend that can support you, maybe then you will have, let's say, be able to do more activities. My aim is to keep kids engaged as much as possible with things that are positive for them because we do not have much programs in the community. Or at least our community is not that much organized to do more things. We, in this country, we are not that much deeply rooted in this country or state, we do not have much capacity in organizing, in terms of organizing things to do more for our kids.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this dissertation was to document the self-expressions of young refugee children through movement and dance and understand the implications of these embodied expressions on their well-being. To this end, I wanted to provide young refugee children with a space to move freely, keeping structured activities to a minimum. Below is a reinstatement of the three research questions addressed in the study:

1. In what ways can expressions through movement and dance support the emotional needs of young refugee children?
2. In what ways can expressions through movement and dance influence the social interactions of young refugee children?
3. In what ways can expressions through movement and dance support the well-being of young refugee children?

To the best of my knowledge, this is one of the early studies in which young refugee children had a platform to express themselves through both structured and unstructured activities. The flexibility in the design of the movement and dance sessions created a supportive environment that allowed the children to naturally share their experiences as and when they wanted to.

There were two focal children in the study, Waheeda and Shabana, aged eleven years and seven years respectively, who participated along with six other Iraqi refugee children in ten movement and dance sessions, over two and a half months. These ten sessions were designed in an iterative manner, using the adaptive methodology (Jegatheesan, 2012). The sessions drove Waheeda and Shabana to share the experiences they endured in their early childhood during the

Civil War in Iraq. The results of the study demonstrate that a) the freedom to take ownership of their activities, can allow for the revival of spontaneity in refugee children who experience a numbing of their emotions due to their exposure to traumatic events, b) the freedom to explore movement without the expectation of strict adherence to preset activities, can encourage young refugee children to develop a sense of agency, and c) the extemporaneous quality of free-flowing movement can contribute to a wider range of facial expressions, gestures, postures and expansive body movements. This expansion of the movement repertoire in refugee children can reconnect them to their physical and emotional selves through heightened body awareness.

Summary of Research Findings

In the following discussion, I will summarize the findings for the two focal children in the analysis, Waheeda and Shabana, in terms of how:

- a) expressions through movement and dance support emotional needs,
- b) expressions through movement and dance influence social interactions, and
- c) expressions through movement and dance support well-being

The analysis of the movement and dance sessions provided clear support for the three research questions. Firstly, the results demonstrate that expressions through movement and dance can support the emotional needs of young refugee children by creating an awareness of the connection between their emotions and the physiological body. Research in neuroscience explains that the physiology of emotions is highly complex and a range of hormonal fluctuations, neurological and cardiovascular effects are connected to emotions. The body mirrors emotions and it is possible to display an emotion without being conscious of the stimuli that induces the emotion (Damasio, 2000, 2011; Sternberg, 2001). This study found support for the body

mirroring emotions through the movement vocabulary, gestures, hand postures and facial expressions of Waheeda and Shabana (see Chapter III and Chapter IV).

Secondly, the results illustrate that expressions through movement and dance can have a positive influence on the social interactions of young refugee children. According to Panksepp (2009), the need for joyful physical engagement is instinctual, and is deep rooted in the mammalian brain. Thus, playful interactions in childhood can help to build a foundation for social learning by reinforcing the interpersonal regulatory circuits in the brain. In the case of Waheeda, the growing sense of ease with her body through the movement and dance sessions added a playful character to her interactions with the other children. And in the case of Shabana, movement and dance became the expression of her creative mind. Through these playful expressions of her thriving imagination, she caught the attention of the other children who were eager to interact with her.

Thirdly, the results demonstrate that expressions through movement and dance can support the well-being of young refugee children. Waheeda's spontaneous and joyful movements were suggestive of a revival of inner happiness and emotional growth. Similarly, Shabana's movements woven into dance sequences and accompanied by humorous stories, indicated her inner joy. Both children experienced a strengthening of their communicative skills, proactively initiating and leading activities during the sessions and demonstrating their growing self-awareness and self-esteem. They developed trust and mutual respect within the collective space, dropping their inhibitions and making way for their childhood spontaneity to resurface.

Expressions Through Movement and Dance Support Emotional Needs

When I first met Waheeda and Shabana, their weary body language, evocative of carrying a heavy weight on their shoulders implied an inner turmoil that both children skillfully concealed on their faces. However, this implicit narrative, that is, the narrative of their emotional trauma during the Civil War in Iraq was evident in their body language. During the initial sessions, Waheeda strictly avoided eye contact with me and looked disinterested in the activities. And while Shabana carefully hid any emotion on her face, she could not hide the glint in her eyes, full of curiosity. Waheeda found ingenious ways to reach out to me while averting her gaze which signaled that she wanted to be heard and had a need to connect with others. As the sessions progressed over the ten weeks, Waheeda began showing signs of engagement by making suggestions about activities to incorporate. Soon these suggestions turned into proactive steps where she gathered all the children together and gave instructions on how to proceed through an activity. She was eager to participate and began to develop a capacity to connect to the other children in the space. One such activity was the game of musical chairs which I integrated into the weekly sessions, upon Waheeda's suggestion. This game transformed into an activity where Waheeda and Shabana, along with the other children explored movement and dance steps, as they moved to the music. Each week, there was mounting excitement among all the children as the game would progress and Waheeda and Shabana chose to dance rather than walk or run around the chairs.

Over the weeks, Waheeda and Shabana experienced a feeling of joy, as they experimented with free-flowing movements, became more talkative and were attuned to the emotions of the other children. There was a noticeable change in their body posture and their gait, as the tension in their muscles gradually disappeared. And with this release of the stiffening

energy of a hyperalert state, they developed a greater awareness of their own body. Waheeda and Shabana reached out to me and the other children, using fluid movements, gestures and facial expressions to articulate their thoughts. They began to express their emotions without any inhibitions, a sign of feeling confident and alive in their bodies. The sensory nature of movement and dance can create awareness of the present moment, the here and now (Stern 2004, 2010), and by doing so support trauma survivors to move their focus away from the past. Margariti (2012), observes that as the movement vocabulary expands, it can help to bring thoughts and emotions to the surface in a nonobtrusive manner. For Waheeda and Shabana, their growing movement vocabulary allowed them to revisit their memories and experiences. These creative self-expressions provided them with emotional nourishment through a capacity to connect and relate to others. They found the freedom to express their emotions, leading to confidence in themselves.

Both Waheeda and Shabana gave free reign to their spontaneity, often leading to light-hearted moments and consequent laughter that spread across the room, like wildfire. Shabana, began to take on the role of the ‘court jester’, often physically acting out a witticism or a one-liner through comical movements, gestures and facial expressions. Research shows that when trauma survivors are able to engage in laughter, it is a sign of resilience. Humor can stimulate various physiological systems that can reduce levels of stress hormones. The visceral act of shaking with laughter when sharing humor with others can be reparative for children with trauma (Levine, 2012; Malchiodi, 2020; Savage et al., 2017).

Expressions Through Movement and Dance Influence Social Interactions

The exposure to mass violence during the Civil War in Iraq created emotional and social challenges for Waheeda and Shabana, who struggle to make meaning of their trauma, loss and

grief. In addition to the trauma, both children experienced the profound loss of their home and the familiar environment of their homeland in Iraq when their families migrated to the United States. This can lead to feelings of alienation in a foreign country as well as additional stress and anxiety (Papadopoulos, 2002). Waheeda's parents had shared their concern over her inability to establish friendships and her tendency to avoid social interactions. Shabana, on the other hand, is able to make friends at school but tends to be overly sentimental, often feeling hurt and crying easily. The movement and dance sessions over the ten weeks addressed their social challenges and empowered them to take ownership of the space. It became a transitional space where Waheeda and Shabana used movement and dance to connect with themselves and the other children (Abu et al., 2005; Steele & Raider, 2001).

Waheeda and Shabana were mindfully aware of others in the space as they moved freely across the room. Waheeda who usually found it difficult to engage socially, began to participate actively in the sessions. During activities, both Waheeda and Shabana insisted that everyone join, including me. As the researcher, I strived to encourage this emerging sense of belongingness in the collective space and the solidarity that was evolving among the children. I explored my own childlike nature in an effort to fill humor and playfulness into their sacred space. Further, I actively participated in the activities initiated by Waheeda and Shabana, to communicate my support for their playful explorations.

Waheeda and Shabana established an increased capacity for connection as they actively interacted with the other children. They were eager to share their own stories and recognized the need of the other children to share as well. For instance, in session seven, Waheeda took on the role of a 'documentarian', as she walked around the room video recording each child and then documented their stories on camera as they narrated them while scribbling on the whiteboard.

Shabana, on her part, often choreographed short dance sequences naturally, using routine activities, such as walking or running, to create rhythmic moves. Together they added a playful atmosphere to the movement and dance sessions, learning from each other. Within the zone of proximal development in Vygotsky's (1978) theoretical model of scaffolding, children co-construct knowledge through their social interactions with each other. For Waheeda and Shabana, interactions between their peers helped to make meaning of their traumatic experiences as they discovered commonalities in their experiences of the Civil war in Iraq. This helped to reduce feelings of isolation and led to empathy for one another. Using movement and dance to create expressions of personal stories, the sessions promoted socialization among the children. In addition, the sessions provided the children the opportunity to share and relate to each other, fostering trust and mutual respect.

Expressions Through Movement and Dance Support Well-being

Traumatic experiences affect Broca's area in the brain which controls language, making it difficult for trauma survivors to verbalize their experiences (van Dalen, 2001). Sensory experiences related to a traumatic event, such as sounds, smells, touch and images, are likely to become learned associations. These sensations could remerge when faced with different yet similar stimuli later as the body is able to remember (Levine, 2012; Rothschild, 2000). As van der Kolk (1994) observes, "the body keeps score", that is, it maintains a somatic memory of emotional experiences related to trauma. Although the power of memory is vital in processing trauma, the memories of trauma may not be easily accessible for communication through language. These memories are stored symbolically as bodily sensations and images that encapsulate every detail of the experience, including emotional responses to the traumatic event. When verbal communication becomes limited, the memories can be externalized through sensory

modes of expression, such as art, play, movement, dance and other experiential activities (Fuchs, 2012; Korn, 2001; Malchiodi, 2012; van der Kolk, 2003). This is a testament to the deep mind-body connection and in the case of Waheeda, the movement activities allowed her to externalize her feelings. The movement and dance sessions offered Waheeda and Shabana, a nonverbal avenue to express their implicit memories of trauma. This bridging of implicit and explicit memories of traumatic events can provide survivors with a sense of control over the disturbing memories (Malchiodi, 2012; Steele & Malchiodi, 2012). This was illustrated in the way Waheeda integrated her traumatic memories into her self-expressions through movement, dance and her live pictorial narrative.

Waheeda and Shabana developed a deeper awareness of their bodies, recognizing their own emotions and exercising the freedom to express them without feeling self-conscious. Their facial expressions were more emotive than at the beginning of the study, when they were more inclined to conceal their emotions. There was a natural fluidity and rhythm in their movements as their repertoire expanded. Through their creative explorations, Waheeda and Shabana were immersed in a multisensory experience: visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic. This multisensory stimulation helped Waheeda to develop awareness of sensations in the present moment leading to a reduction in her emotional numbness. Further, the externalization of her emotions expressed through movement and dance released the tension in her body and led to a reduction in hyperarousal (Malchiodi, 2012). Shabana's implicit narrative that was suggested by her jaded body language, began to metamorphose into a narrative of hand gestures, facial expressions, dance, movement and verbal language. Her body evoked joy and playfulness and she was driven by excitement and curiosity.

Waheeda grew increasingly interactive and established a friendly and playful relationship with me and the other children over the course of the ten weeks. Dance and movement sparked a feeling of joy in her, bringing with it the possibility of personal growth and emotional well-being. The expressions through movement and dance empowered her to explore adaptive coping strategies as she embarked on the journey of revisiting her traumatic experiences. In Shabana's case, she learnt to address her heightened emotionality by diffusing her vulnerable emotional state through sensory expressions: gestures, movement and dance. She allowed her imagination to inspire her movements and vice versa, such that her mind and body were in a spirited conversation with each other. Similarly, Waheeda conveyed her emotions through her fluid and unbounded movements, as she began to revive the natural rhythm in her body.

Through their kinesthetic expressions, Waheeda and Shabana reconnected with their deep repository of emotions, recognizing their core needs. Lastly, the sensory-kinesthetic experience of movement and dance opened a plethora of pathways to their wellbeing, among them, humor, spontaneity, joy, playfulness, trust, and mutual respect.

I will end the discussion of the research findings with a comparative analysis of the two children, highlighting the similarities and differences between them, in their exposure to traumatic events and their emotional health before their participation in this study.

Similarities in Experiences and Emotional Health

Waheeda and Shabana have a history of exposure to extreme violence through war in their country of birth, that is, Iraq. Both children were exposed to traumatic events during their early childhood, that is, Waheeda was six years old and Shabana was two years old. Both children moved to the United States directly from Iraq without being placed in an interim country or refugee camp during their transition. They traveled together with their parents and

siblings as one family unit to the same suburb on the west coast of the United States, a year apart from each other. Waheeda moved in 2015 while Shabana moved in 2016. Waheeda and Shabana left behind their large extended families in Iraq, including their grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. The parental interviews revealed certain similarities in the impact of the war on the emotional health of Waheeda and Shabana. Both children were disposed to sleep disturbances marked by nightmares and an inability to fall asleep. Children exposed to trauma and grief commonly experience changes in arousal, such as hyperarousal and feelings of emotional distress leading to sleep difficulties (Korn, 2001; Levy et al., 2006; Malchiodi, 2020).

Both children have younger siblings. Waheeda is the eldest of four siblings while Shabana is the eldest of three siblings. They enjoy spending time with their siblings and have a nurturing attitude towards them, as evidenced by their behavior during my home visits and the movement sessions. Through my home visits to their families and my interactions with the parents throughout the study, it became clear that both Waheeda and Shabana were deeply loved and cared for. Family support and family resiliency are important contributors to children's ability to cope with adversity. In the case of Waheeda and Shabana, their families displayed resilience by functioning well despite facing adverse life circumstances through terrorism and war (Patterson, 2002; Rutter, 1985; Walsh, 2006; Werner, 1993).

Differences in Experiences and Emotional Health

In their early childhood, Waheeda and Shabana had both been exposed to highly stressful, and anxiety-provoking situations through acts of terrorism in Iraq. However, the nature of their exposure was different. Waheeda had two instances of direct exposure to extreme violence that threatened the safety of her entire family, including herself. In the first instance, terrorist bombed her house in Iraq, killing her cousin Zafar, who was her playmate. She

witnessed Zafar's death as she stood with her mother and three siblings amidst the wreckage left by the attack on her house. Through the death of Zafar, Waheeda has experienced deep personal loss and grief. In the second instance, terrorist attacked a hotel in Baghdad, where Waheeda and her family were staying the night before their immigration interview at the American Embassy. The attack killed many of the hotel guests and staff and Waheeda witnessed the bloodshed as she narrowly escaped with her family. Shabana, on the other hand, experienced vicarious trauma through the repeated exposure to the violence in her hometown in Iraq. Although she did not face the loss of any immediate family member, her indirect experience of trauma was heightened by the everyday sounds of gunshots and bombings in her hometown as well as the graphic and constant media coverage of the war. Waheeda's repeated exposure to traumatic experiences have made her prone to psychological distress and anxiety. Diagnosed with PTSD, Waheeda struggles with intense and recurring nightmares. She forces herself to stay awake to avoid nightmares and for fear of never waking up again. Waheeda faces social and emotional challenges as well, unable to make friends at school and struggles to regulate her frequently fluctuating moods. She is withdrawn and avoids social contact. Shabana, on the other hand, participates in social interactions and has friends in school. But although she is open to social communication, she maintains a quiet demeanor, often preoccupied with reading books and drawing. She struggles with sleep disturbances and occasional but intense nightmares. Besides, as mentioned by her father, she is emotionally very sensitive and inclined to crying easily.

The comparison of the experiences and emotional health of Waheeda and Shabana showcase that children exposed to mass violence during war are likely to struggle with psychological distress and trauma years later. The movement and dance sessions provided them an opportunity to explore adaptive coping skills and supported their well-being.

Researcher Presence During the Movement and Dance Sessions: Methodological Reflections

In my dissertation, I utilized the qualitative design which included observations of movement and dance sessions as well as interviews with parents and children. Fieldwork for me involved close and direct contact with the children and their parents.

My initial interactions with the children and informal observation of parent-child interactions, clearly indicated to me that the children were not expected to adhere to strict social rules (e.g., they were permitted to interrupt adults in the middle of a conversation). They were allowed to freely express themselves and state their needs and wants. Parents indulged in their children's requests and promptly abandoned their current activities to fulfil these requests. This observation was made across each of the families showcasing the importance of being flexible and adaptable. Establishing a sense of normalcy with the children appeared to be valuable and so I decided to maintain consistency between the home environment and the movement and dance sessions, in terms of the flexibility of social interactions.

In session one it became clear to me that the ideal roles for me to take on with the children would be as a facilitator and a friend. I also needed to be patient, understanding, and accommodating given that they were vulnerable children. Fine and Sandstorm (1988) stress the importance of the researcher's sincere interest in working with children as a key factor in conducting fieldwork with them. Some of the required personality characteristics of a researcher conducting fieldwork with children include: a) being patient, b) being comfortable acting "silly" (Holmes, 1995, p. 17), c) being willing to accept the frankness of children (Holmes, 1995). Researchers working with young children often adopt the role of a friend as found in Fine & Sandstorm (1988) and Mandell (1988) who conveyed positive emotions, treating the children

with respect, and reflecting an honest effort to interact with them. I believe the role of a friend was responsible for the ease with which I was able to build a relationship of trust, respect, and a feeling of comfort with the children. During my initial interaction with the children in their homes, I was viewed as an adult authority figure, similar to a schoolteacher, who would likely give them instructions on how to proceed when the sessions began. But my openness to adapt, to listen to their suggestions and allow them to take the lead in many activities helped change their perception of me and also created a safe space for them. At times I became the learner as the children became my teachers in helping me to know about their world (Holmes, 1998). By session two, the children had begun to get comfortable, with the exception of the two focal children who demonstrated some hesitation and shyness in the early sessions. Gradually, over the course of the ten sessions the children and I developed a relationship that was based on trust, empathy, and respect, all of which are vital during fieldwork (Jegatheesan & Witz, 2014; Sage & Jegatheesan, 2010; Tobin, 2000).

Throughout the sessions I was in tune with the children's socio-emotional communications. I was flexible and was not bothered when children took away my phone to create a playlist of their favorite music to dance to. I often joined them in crawling, kneeling, and sitting on the floor during my interactions. Flexibility was key in letting the children know that they were in a safe and caring space. Furthermore, the flexibility of the design of this study supported the voice of the children to be heard which encouraged them to take control over the activities at certain times. This is especially important when working with children who have been exposed to hardships. In essence, a child-centered bottom-up approach is necessary in working with vulnerable children (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Jegatheesan, 2012). It allows children to be able to share their own experiences, their cultural knowledge, and their inner perspectives.

Scholars who have worked with a range of children (typically developing and children with special needs) have emphasized the value of these qualities during fieldwork with children (Fine & Sandstorm, 1988; Holmes, 1995; Mandell, 1988; Sage & Jegatheesan, 2010).

My communication and interaction with the children was friendly, light-hearted and welcoming and soon all of the children warmed up to me. Qualitative researchers have documented that children respond best when the researcher connects with them at the same level as they are, in that, the researcher responds with affective and positive emotions (e.g., joyful, cheerful, supportive) and takes on the role of a friend, a playmate, a companion and a confidante (Fine & Sandstorm, 1988; Holmes, 1998; Jegatheesan et al., 2009; Mandell, 1988; Tobin, 2000).

According to Graue and Walsh (1998), there can be “elasticity” (p. 29) in the boundaries between the researcher and the children in fieldwork, allowing for reciprocity in sharing experiences with each other, based on a foundation of trust. As the sessions progressed over the weeks, I noticed that the children took charge of their activities. In many instances, they taught me how to dance and asked me to follow them. I was a reassuring presence to them as they exercised their freedom to explore and express themselves through the creative modalities. They shared their past and present experiences with me spontaneously as they began to feel comfortable in the space with me. It is important that the researcher is flexible about the different roles that he/she may need to adopt while working with young children. These roles cannot be predetermined and will influence the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the children (Freeman & Mathison, 2009).

Prominent qualitative researchers (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Wolcott, 2008) have also emphasized the importance of reflexivity when researchers embark on qualitative studies where they build reciprocal relationships and influence each other. It is very important that the

researcher reflects on her/his own voice and perspective during fieldwork with children to understand the phenomenon being examined. Creswell (2013) highlights the importance of the voice of the researcher being examined. In keeping with this, after fieldwork I reflected on my manner of interaction and communication style, that is, how did children respond to my intonation and tone of voice, was my communication style a trigger that set them back or was it supportive. Throughout fieldwork, I ensured that I am approachable, accommodating and indicated that their needs were my priority. For example, if any child did not want to participate in any activity during a session, they were free to sit and watch.

Being an immigrant, I come from a similar culture as my participants. Jegatheesan (2012) discusses how researchers who are insiders to the community are able to gain an understanding of the community and family values. I was able to relate to the Iraqi community and their family values, which facilitated the building of mutual trust and respect with the families (Nickerson et al., 2011). My personal history and cultural experiences were valuable in designing the weekly movement and dance sessions. Although I do not have the same social and emotional experiences related to the trauma of war, this foundation of trust facilitated the deepening of our relationship over the weeks. I was mindful to act with humility and modesty with the families and not coming across as an expert insider, qualities which are fundamental in conducting ethical and respectful research (Jegatheesan, 2012).

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

The limitations in this dissertation study are few potential areas for future research. Firstly, the study sample was small, with only eight refugee children and secondly, all of them belong to a single cultural community, that of Iraqi refugee families. Thirdly, all four families in the study recently settled in the United States within the past five years (2014 - 2019). Fourthly, the children were recruited for the study from the four families based on availability using convenience sampling. Therefore, in order to understand the scope of the insights from the study, future work can be designed to examine a larger population that is randomly selected and incorporate other cultural communities within the refugee population who have lived in the United States for longer than five years. Finally, the scalability of the study given the semi-structured nature of the movement and dance sessions cannot be ascertained without further research.

Contributions of the Study

This dissertation makes contributions to our understanding of the linkage between the body and the mind for refugee children with traumatic life experiences. The results of the study showcase that expressions through movement and dance can positively impact the socioemotional development and psychological well-being of refugee children as follows:

The '*Synergistic loop*' - Based on the movement vignettes, this dissertation study proposes a new term called the '*Synergistic loop*'. This term refers to the interactive nature of self-expressions through movement, dance, drawing and other art forms, where each form 'speaks' to the other. For example, an expression initiated in a spontaneous movement (say) sets the stage for its progression into a visual form, which in turn fuels its expression into a sequence of expansive movements, in what could be seen as a *relay race*, with each form taking on where

the other *hands over* the narrative. In this study, the trauma narratives shared by the two focal children through movement and dance are indicative of this interactive and integrative system of body and emotion.

Revival of spontaneity through movement and dance - Illustrates the value of semi-structured sessions of movement and dance with young refugee children. Refugee children who experience a numbing of their emotions due to their exposure to mass violence during war, can experience a resurgence of their spontaneity when they are allowed the freedom to take ownership of their activities, as seen in the movement and dance sessions.

Trust and respect through child informed and flexible sessions - Semi-structured and unstructured sessions provide flexibility when working with culturally diverse populations with traumatic experiences and allows the growth of deep trust and mutual respect between the researcher and the participants. Sensitivity to culture helps to develop trust (Ghosh-Ippen, 2009; Rogoff, 2003). Moreover, a sense of *belongingness* emerges and develops when children begin to take *initiative* in activities and take *ownership* of a space. For refugee children, this sense of belongingness is critical given the profound loss of their home and familiar settings as they restart their lives in a foreign land. Besides, the extemporaneous quality of free-flowing movement can contribute to a progression of expansive body movements, facial expressivity, and a wider range of self-expressions through gestures and postures. This expansion of the movement repertoire in refugee children can reconnect them to their physical and emotional selves through *heightened body awareness*. Overall, the nature of the movement and dance sessions in the study allowed the voice of the refugee children to be heard.

Agency to make choices through movement and dance - The freedom to explore movement, dance, and other art forms without the expectation of strict adherence to preset

activities has the potential to enable young refugee children to develop a sense of agency. This freedom can further nurture mutual trust and respect, as well as a sense of belongingness within a space, as illustrated through the two focal children.

Interdisciplinary research at the intersection of psychology, education, the arts, neuroscience, and neurobiology have possibilities to further enhance our understanding of psychological trauma in refugee children. The fundamental contribution of this dissertation work is the simplicity and flexibility of the sessions, supported by the parents and informally guided by the children, allowing the growth of mutual trust and respect. The study was designed using a methodology that allowed child informed movement and dance sessions, within a community setting. I observed continued growth and transition in the communicative skills of the two focal children as they progressed through the sessions. They began to take initiative in the sessions and their enthusiasm to participate increased noticeably. Given the results of this study, future research guided by community practices and informed by the family, can be invaluable for educators and practitioners, when working with the increasingly diverse worldwide refugee population. Stronger conceptualization of the embodied nature of trauma expressions through movement, dance, and other art forms, can inform practices to support young trauma survivors through the ongoing mind-body interaction.

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Appendix A: Call for Participation



RESEARCH STUDY FOR CHILDREN

Dance & Art for Language Development & Learning

DEAR PARENTS



University of Washington researchers are doing a study on how
DANCE & ART CAN HELP IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE

CHILDREN (6 to 12 yrs. old) in language development & learning. For more information
please contact:

Ms. Pongkhi Bujorbarua

Doctoral candidate, Educational Psychology, University of Washington

Call , pongkhi@uw.edu



PhD Advisor: Prof. Brinda Jegatheesan

Associate Professor

Educational Psychology, Learning Sciences & Human Development

University of Washington; brinda@uw.edu

Appendix B: Demographic Information Survey (with parents)

Your information

	Mother	Father
Parent Name		
Age		
Occupation		
Religion		
Nationality		
Country of origin		
Countries lived in prior to the U.S. (if any)		
Date/Year of departure to the United States		
Languages spoken		
Any extended family in the United States?		

Information on your children

Name	Age	Gender	Has a disability? Yes/No	If child has a disability, provide information on accommodations required (if any)

Additional information/comments: _____

Thank you!

Appendix C: Sample Interview Questions with Parents (for pre-study interview)

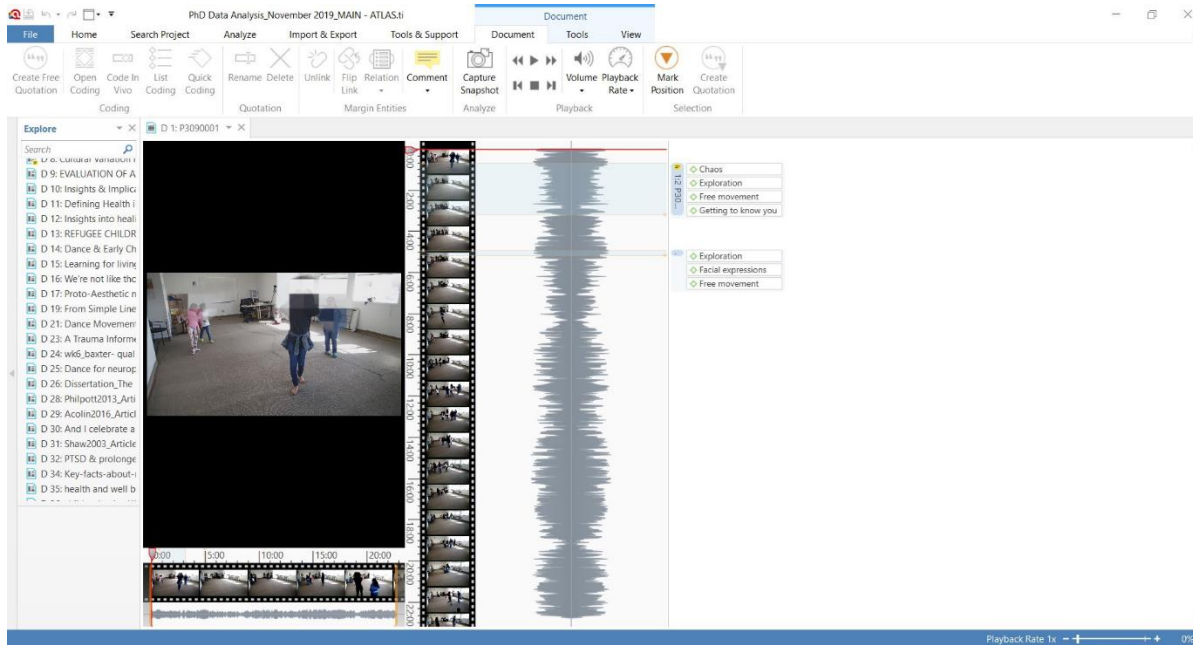
- a. Tell me the story of how you came to the United States
- b. How old was your child when he/she moved here?
- c. Did your family move together? Who accompanied your child here?
- d. Would you like to talk a little about the preparation for this journey was like for you (were you able to plan at all/ was it too abrupt/etc.)?
- e. What was the actual journey like for you as a family and your child in particular? What was your child's emotional state during this phase?
- f. Could you talk about your child's emotional and overall state in the years/ months after arriving here? Over the years since then, have there been any changes in your child's emotional state? If yes, what/how so/could you elaborate?
- g. What do you consider the main strengths of your child and your family as a unit/ main achievements or highlights over the last few years for your child?
- h. How do you think your child is doing now emotionally and intellectually/any concerns/ minor or major challenges?
- i. Among the challenges you listed (if any), are there any areas of concern that are highly sensitive that you would not like me to touch upon/avoid bringing up with your child during the movement and dance sessions?
- j. In the event sensitive emotional issues surface and cause a certain level of discomfort/ anxiety for your child during our weekly sessions, what actions/steps/exercises (if any) would you suggest I employ to alleviate the anxiety and discomfort for your child? (You can step in to comfort your child anytime, if that is what you think is best)

Appendix D: Sample Interview Questions with Children

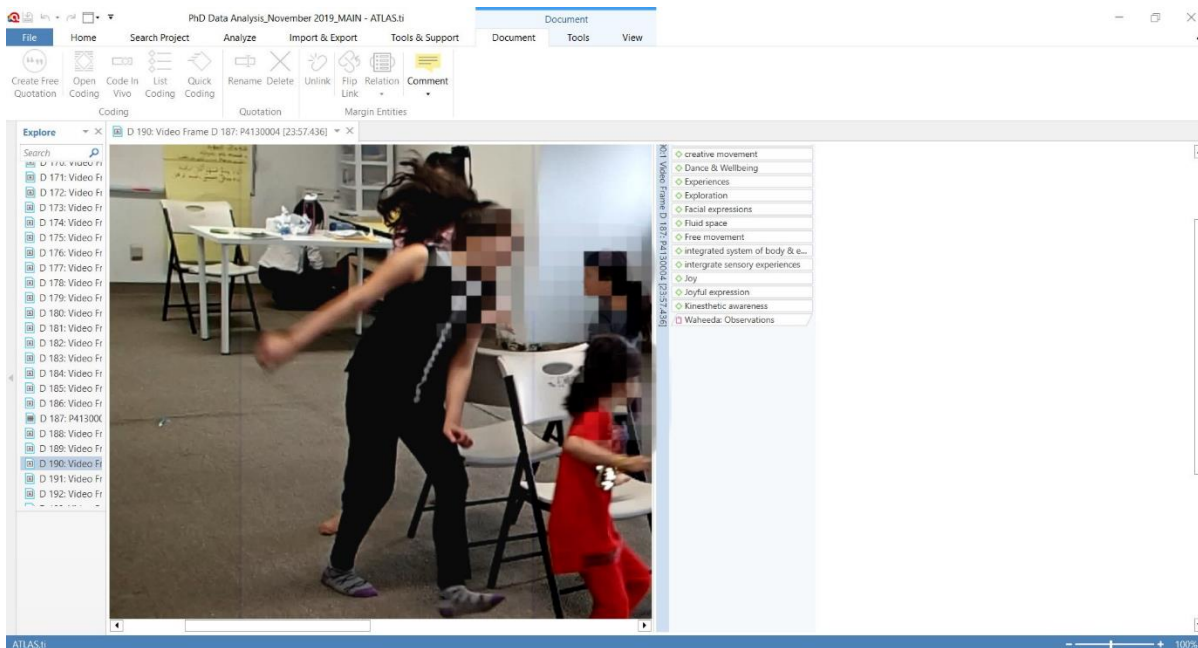
- a. What is your name?
- b. Do you have any hobbies? What do you like to do?
- c. Do you like any games? What do you like to play?
- d. Do you have friends? Do you want to tell me about them?
- e. Do you want to ask me any questions?

Appendix E: ATLAS.ti Screenshots of Tools Used

Quotations

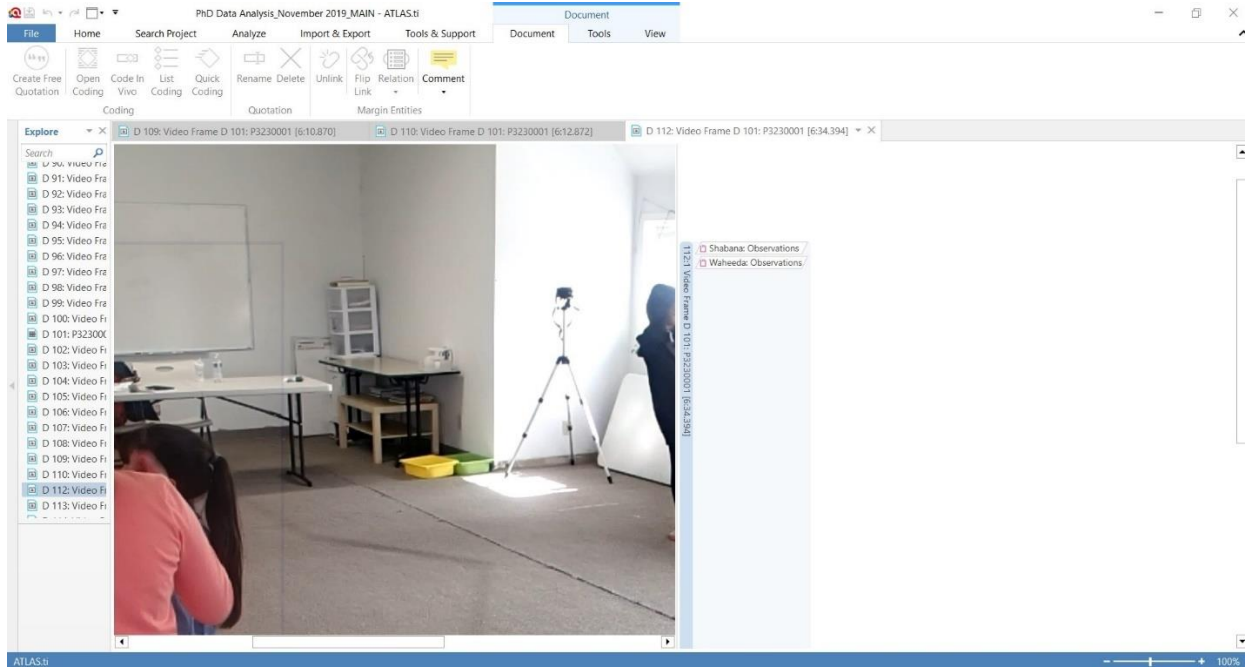


Open coding



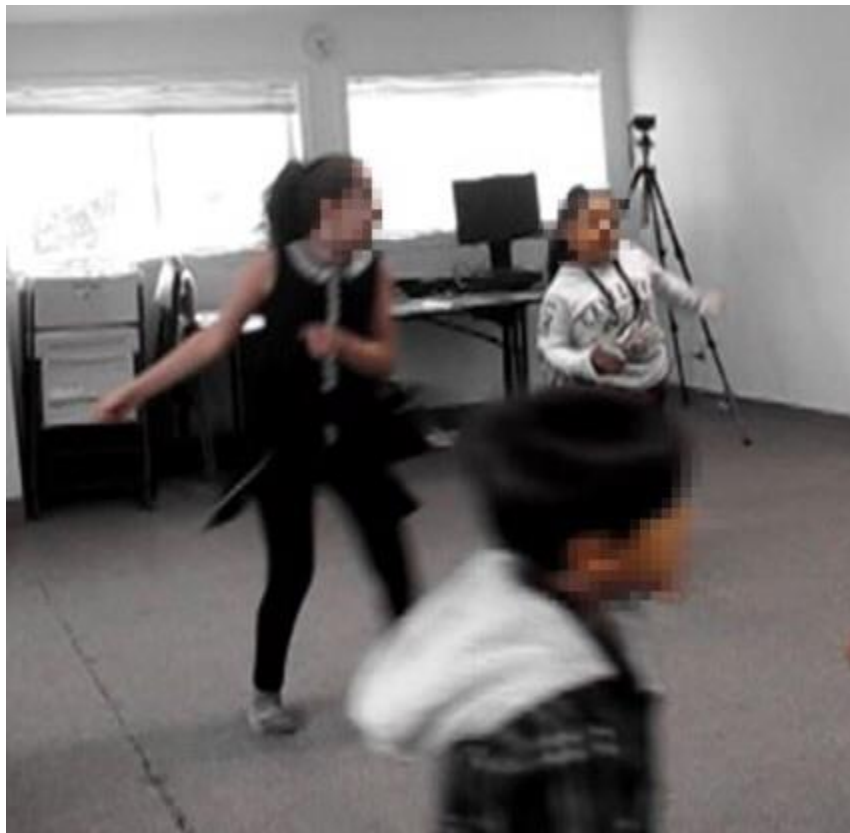
Appendix E continued: ATLAS.ti Screenshots of Tools Used

Memos



Appendix F: Snapshots of Children from the Movement and Dance Sessions (digitally filmed)







Appendix G: Parent Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON CONSENT FORM

A research study exploring expressions through movement and dance with children

Study Researchers:

a. Pongkhi Bujorbarua

Primary researcher/Investigator,
PhD candidate in Educational Psychology,
College of Education, University of Washington,
Mobile no. xxx-xxx-xxxx: email: pongkhi@uw.edu

b. Prof. Brinda Jegatheesan

Faculty Advisor,
College of Education, University of Washington, Seattle

c. Aishah Jalani

Research Assistant,
PhD student in Educational Psychology,
College of Education, University of Washington, Seattle

We are asking you to be in a research study. This form gives you information to help you decide if you would want your child and yourself to be in the study. Being in the study is voluntary for both you and your child. Please read this document carefully. You may ask any questions about the study to me, Pongkhi Bujorbarua. Then you can decide whether or not you want to be in the study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to explore how children can express themselves through movement and dance and how such expressions may contribute to their well-being.

STUDY PROCEDURES

In this study data will be collected using several procedures, namely, surveys, interviews, observations and sessions on movement exploration. Following is a description of the different types of methodologies:

- a) **Demographic survey:** A demographic survey will be conducted that will include data on you and your child related to age, gender, ethnicity, religion, date of arrival to the United States, schooling, and so on.
- b) **Parental interviews:** The primary researcher shall be conducting an informal interview with you.
- c) **Children's interviews:** At the beginning of the study, there shall be an informal interview with your child asking questions that will seek information on his/her hobbies, likes and dislikes, life in school, about his/her friends/peers, etc. This interview with your child will only be conducted on completion of the parental interview with you, to allow the researcher to take into account and follow up on information provided by you on your child.
- d) **Weekly sessions on movement exploration and expressions:** Every week, your child will participate in group activities including movement, dance, artwork, drama, storytelling and choreography to narrate their personal stories and experiences.
- e) **Observations:** For conducting interviews (both with you and your child), it is likely that I would be making home visits, if that is the location of your preference. In such cases, I will be making informal observations and writing descriptive observation notes based on the visit.
- f) **Journaling:** You will contribute to the weekly data by maintaining a journal to document your child's behavior during each week. You will be asked to supplement your notes with pictures of your child, that is, photo journaling to capture moments that support your observations.

Study duration and location: The study will be conducted over 8 - 10 weeks, with one session per week. Each weekly session will be for about 1.5 to 2 hours at the maximum. Location to be decided.

PERCEIVABLE RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

As a study participant, your child will take part in activities such as movement, dance, storytelling, art, etc. and it is possible that these activities may arouse certain emotions, which may or may not lead to a certain level of discomfort. You shall be informed of any discomfort, if noticed or expressed verbally by your child during any part of the study. Your child will always have the option to participate in as many or as few of the activities in the study during each session, as he/she wishes and is free to withdraw from the research at any time.

The study will keep the audio and video recordings indefinitely, and the researcher may use clippings of them for presentations or publications.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

It may be likely that participants in the study could benefit through socialization with their peers during the weekly sessions.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION

All data will be confidential (linked to identifiers). The researchers (Pongkhi Bujorbarua, Prof. Brinda Jegatheesan, Aishah Jalani), will have access to the identifiable data. The data will be stored in a secured locked cabinet at the University of Washington, Seattle.

Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

OTHER INFORMATION

You may refuse to allow your child to participate or refuse to participate in the study yourself. You and your child are free to withdraw from this study at any time without any penalty in any way.

RESEARCH-RELATED INJURY

If you think you have been harmed from being in this research, contact Pongkhi Bujorbarua

at xxx-xxx-xxxx and/or email: pongkhi@uw.edu. The UW does not normally provide compensation for harm except through its discretionary program for medical injury. However, the law may allow you to seek other compensation if the harm is the fault of the researchers.

Your statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, I can contact the primary researcher, Pongkhi Bujorbarua, whose details are listed on the first page of this consent form.

If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098 or call collect at (206) 221-5940. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

a. If you prefer to call by phone, please feel free to call me, Pongkhi Bujorbarua, anytime at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

If you as a parent/caregiver are willing to participate, please sign below.

b. Signature of parent/caregiver willing to participate in the study:

Printed name of parent/caregiver	Signature of parent/caregiver	Date
----------------------------------	-------------------------------	------

c. Signature of parent consenting to child (minor) participating in the study:

Printed name of parent/caregiver	Signature of parent(caregiver)	Date
----------------------------------	--------------------------------	------

Printed name of child(minor)

Appendix H: Child Assent Form
ASSENT FORM FOR CHILDREN

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
ASSENT TO RESEARCH

STUDY OF MOVEMENT, DANCE, STORYTELLING, DRAWING,
SINGING

Lead Researcher:

Pongkhi Bujorbarua

Primary researcher/Investigator,

PhD candidate in Educational Psychology,

College of Education, University of Washington, Mobile no.: xxx-xxx-xxxx

Researcher's statement:

My name is Pongkhi Bujorbarua. I am asking you to be in a study because I want to learn more about children like you who do activities such as dancing, storytelling, drawing, singing and playing music.

If you would like to be in this study, then some activities you will do are dancing, moving around, storytelling, drawing and singing. These activities will be done once a week and you will do it with other children together. You may make new friends, share stories and dance together!

Please talk with your parent about this before you decide if you want to do this or not. I will also ask your parent if it is okay for you to be in this study. But even if your parent says, "Yes, you can be in the study", you can still choose not to do it.

Remember, if you don't want to be in the study, you don't have to! It is all up to you and no one will be upset if you don't want to do it or even if you change your mind later and want to stop.

You can ask me any questions about the study. You can also call me if you have a question later at xxx-xxx-xxxx or ask me next time we meet.

If you want to do it and be in this study, then write 'YES' in the box at the bottom. I will give you and your parent a copy of this form after you have written 'YES' on it.

Your statement:

The study has been explained to me and I want to take part in this study. If I have any questions, I can ask the researcher, Pongkhi Bujorbarua.

I WANT TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY (WRITE 'YES' ABOVE) DATE

RESEARCHER'S SIGNATURE DATE

Author's Biography

My research is primarily focused on learning how the different forms of art, such as dance, music, poetry, painting, drama, and so forth can contribute to the resiliency and overall well-being of children who have faced adversity. The population I am especially interested in are refugee children who have been exposed to natural disasters, war, and extreme violence.