Critique of “Recreational Folk Dance: A Multicultural Exercise Component in Healthy Ageing”

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Australia is changing the way society views the elderly population, specifically with the stereotypes of what they can and can’t do. In the article by Margaret Connor, “Recreational Folk Dance: A Multicultural Exercise Component in Healthy Ageing,” folk dancing is described as a therapeutic recreation outlet for the elderly population. The article expounds on what the folk dancing program is, the social and physical issues facing the elderly population, and how a recreational activity, such as folk dancing, brings value to the lives of older individuals.

Summary

Folk dancing consists of dances that reflect the cultures of various countries/regions around the world. The specific program developed in Australia adapts traditional folk dance routines for those who can’t exert themselves at a higher level. These dance routines were developed primarily for women, as “they make up a larger proportion of the older population” (Connor, 2000, p.70). They are gentle exercises that can increase in complexity depending on the individual’s ability and progress.

The older population faces many issues both physically and socially. The article mentions that not only does the physical body start to encounter more problems as age increases, but social opportunities and quality of life tends to decrease. Government bodies are attempting to redefine the stereotypes regarding the elderly. Recreational programs, such as folk dancing, can help change the negativity surrounding the elderly image and bring renewed physical health to many individuals.

Strengths

The strengths of the article revolved around how folk dancing brings value to the lives of older individuals. The article specifically brought up the value of the process, which caused me to think of what Dr. Zabriskie specifically emphasized in class! It talked about the benefits of
just touching other people and how the opportunity to touch and hold hands in a group “provides the tactile stimulation that many people may have been lacking as old friends, spouses, or relatives die” (Connor, 2000, p.74). Just like when we played the “touching knees game” in class, there is a lot of positive outcomes resulting from a simple activity where you expand boundaries and appropriately touch other people.

The article also included many statistics proving the physical, social, and emotional benefits of recreational activities for the elderly. One study evaluated the benefits gained from the folk dance group. The results were: social, 56%; physical, 50%; dance, 25%; and concentration and memory or other mental skills, 19%.

Weaknesses

While Connor’s arguments and facts seem very logical and valid, there are a few weaknesses. The article talked about the benefits of folk dancing programs, but it did not touch on how to get elderly people interested in such a unique activity. I have volunteered around many elderly people and many of them are too reserved to participate in activities that are out of their comfort zone. The article could have addressed this concern and given ideas on how to recruit people for the folk dancing programs, or how to provide meaningful activities that everyone would participate in.

Application

Connor’s article can be applied in multiple ways throughout communities across the world. Dance programs such as this can be implemented in nursing homes, assisted living centers, retirement homes, senior community centers, and any other communities where elderly citizens reside. I think it can be especially useful in areas of the country where there is a large melting pot of ethnicities or languages. The article identified dance as a powerful non-verbal
activity, which could be very beneficial in unifying communities where there are people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

**Personal Interest**

My personal reaction to the article is one of respect, interest, and enthusiasm. I felt like the arguments were compelling, supported, and well researched. My interest was also high because I am a ballroom dancer and I have strong opinions about the power that dancing can have in people’s lives. I truly believe that the process of learning new steps, interacting with other people, using memory to remember routines, and the wide variety of other skills learned can holistically benefit individuals in countless ways. Dancing gives a sense of purpose, accomplishment, and self-esteem by using our bodies to express ourselves.

Connor’s article was enlightening and inspiring. I am encouraged by the good efforts being made in Australia to increase the quality of life for people who are elderly. Folk dancing and other forms of dance affect individuals and communities in positive ways.
References