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Structured dance routines as an effective form of supplementary treatment for the symptoms of Parkinson's disease

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STRUCTURED DANCE ROUTINES AS AN EFFECTIVE FORM OF SUPPLEMENTARY
TREATMENT FOR THE SYMPTOMS OF PARKINSON'S DISEASE

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors with Distinction

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This Study by: Kate Bergin

Entitled: Structured Dance Routines as an Effective form of Supplementary Treatment for the Symptoms of Parkinson's Disease

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation

University Honors with Distinction

Date

(type name), Honors Thesis Advisor

Date

Dr. Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

Honors Thesis Reflection

I chose to examine the effects of different styles of dance on individuals with Parkinson's disease for two reasons. The first being that I have a passion for dance. It has been a part of my life since I was five years old, and over the years it has brought me a lot of joy and allowed me to express my creativity. The second reason is that in the past I had heard that dance could be used as a form of therapy for various motor disorders, and I found that fascinating. I wanted to know which styles of dance have been proven to have a positive effect on the individual's motor movement and their overall well-being. Because I know someone who has Parkinson's disease, I chose to focus on this particular motor disorder and examine the existing research on the effects of dance therapy has on individuals with Parkinson's disease.

I knew that it would be too large of a task to conduct my own research on which style of dance is the most effective as a form of treatment, so I decided to instead examine the existing research and create routines that are choreographed based on the findings of these studies. I thought that finding enough research participants in Cedar Falls who would be willing to participate in dance therapy sessions would bordering on impossible given my busy schedule. I didn't have the time or resources to find and contact individuals with Parkinson's disease in the area. Once I had determined that this project would be more of a systematic review of existing research, I wanted to add a creative component that would allow me to do something with the research that I had done, so I decided to create videos based on what types of dance had been researched already. After I completed researching, I chose three styles of dance to create routines from. These styles were ballet, Irish dance, and the tango. All three share a very upright posture that is incorporated into their technique, which research showed to be effective for patients with Parkinson's. I then began to choreograph ten videos, three routines of each style and a warm-up and filmed them. This was perhaps the most challenging component of this project for me because I have no real prior experience with filming or editing videos.

Once the filming was completed, I uploaded the videos to YouTube as a means of sharing the research and work that I had done.

The creative aspect of this project is what made this project meaningful to me. The research component satisfied my curiosity, but it was being able to choreograph routines that made me have a stronger connection to what I had found out. I was able to use dance a tool to help others. This project allowed me to share my love of dance with a group of people that can benefit physically and socially for the atmosphere that dance classes for Parkinson's patients create, and that made me feel very humbled. Through this project I was able to combine two of my biggest passions in life, making other people's lives better and dancing.

I had not thought much about what I could personally do past creating dance routines and posting them online, but Dr. Moon made a suggestion during thesis presentation day that I have not been able to stop thinking about. She floated the idea of potentially teaching a class and starting a local program for people with Parkinson's. I had not truly considered this idea before, but with my previous teaching experience and the knowledge that I have gained through researching for this project, it is something that I could see myself doing sometime in the future. I'll be working with this patient population this summer and I am excited to talk to them about the possibilities of dance therapy.

It is when passions cross that there is the possibility for great outcomes, and for me, I believe that this is one of those moments. I have been given the tools to make people's lives better through dance, and that is the most important result of this project for me. I now realize that my passion for dance does not have to stop now that I am going to pursue a higher degree and eventually a career. Not only that, but I can also share my passion with people that can greatly benefit from it, and at the end of the day, that is all I could hope to do.