

Physiological methods for evaluating community dance projects (a research initiative with Yorkshire Dance)

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Abstract

Over the past 10 years the number of dance-based studies involving older adults and children have increased in number, supporting the benefits of dance in improving a range of physical functions. However, the focus of these studies has been limited to either social dancing or has been more often than not qualitative in nature. Given the potential benefits of dance, some of my recent and future work, in conjunction with Yorkshire Dance, Leeds Public Health and One Dance UK aims to establish a more rigorous evidence base for the benefits of contemporary dance to overall health and wellbeing. 'Dancing in Time' was our first collaborative project which aimed to examine the feasibility of using contemporary dance to modify risk factors of falls in older adults. An uncontrolled 'pre-post' intervention design was used. Three groups of older (Mean Age=77.3yrs) adults were recruited from local community groups to participate in a 3 separate, 8 week dance programmes.

Each programme comprised two, 90 minute dance classes per week. Quantitative measures of physical activity, sedentary behaviour, depression, mobility and fear of falling were measured at baseline (T1) and after 8 weeks of dance (T2). Weekly attendance was noted, and post-study qualitative work was conducted with participants in 3 separate focus groups. The attrition and adherence rate are similar to those which have been previously reported for other community based intervention programmes for falls and for other dance related programmes. Participants were more active, had improved balance and mood, and had more confidence in performing tasks without falling at the end of the 8 weeks. Focus groups indicated that participants enjoyed dance as a means of being active and reported physical and psychological health gains. The recruitment of older adults, good adherence and favourability across all three sites indicate that a dance programme can improve physical and psychological health, but this may be limited to females only, and while our initial data is promising, it must be viewed with some caution given the small number of people who participated.

We now look forward to extending our work across Yorkshire, both replicating and extending the 'Dancing in Time' project to add to our body of knowledge, and build a replicable scalable dance programme to improve health and wellbeing in a range of individuals, particularly older adults.

