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Fitness through folk dance

This paper identifies folk dance as a means through which people can increase their fitness levels, psychologically and physically. It will use Irish dance as a case study and recordings and live demonstrations during the presentation will validate the academic theories presented. The first section of the paper will focus on the use of dance as a physical fitness tool. Then, the paper will focus on the impact of dance from psychological perspectives. Specific areas receiving attention include Self-Expression, Identity, Authenticity and Isolation. Then the paper addresses methods of teaching dance which facilitate optimum levels of fitness. The paper argues that dance can increase fitness more intensely if it is approached from artistic perspectives. In an artistic context, there is a mind-body connection. There, both physical and psychological fitness levels are being challenged simultaneously. This approach is in direct contrast to the popular dancercise class. There, the experience is skills driven and the participants often move in isolation to each other. In this superficial context, there is little room for socio-emotional expression.

Biography

Sharon Phelan lectures in Physical Education and Dance at the Institute of Technology, in Tralee, Co. Kerry, Ireland. She has danced with Siamsa Tire, the National Folk Theatre of Ireland, for over twenty-five years and she is a National Facilitator in Dance with the Department of Education. Sharon was responsible for the first dance syllabus at second level in Ireland and she has also published internationally on dance, from educational, artistic and cultural perspectives. In 2014, her book, 'Dance in Ireland: Steps, Stages and Stories' was published by Cambridge Scholars Press. Her current areas of interest include supervision of dance research at masters and at doctoral levels and the use of distance learning in dance in third level. She is also completing another book, which focuses on dance-in-education from an all-inclusive perspective.

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