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Elderly persons participating in dance workshop

Kerstin Thornberg, Staffan Josephsson
Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden

Introduction:

Lately there had been an increasing interest in the impact of different creative activities such as art, Dance and music in health care practices. The amount of research exceeding traditional scientific knowledge is however limited.

Research on what meaning participation in dance workshop gives to life when getting older could add to knowledge on how to age in a meaningful way. According to Ricoeur and Mattingly a human being can create understanding of the self by telling stories or performing in some other way like for instance in dancing. An activity is perceived as meaningful if it leads to understanding of important events in life.

Research done shows that dancing has a positive effect on elderly persons regarding body function such as balance, and also on psychological areas such as increased spontaneous expressions of feelings and interaction. Yet if dancing can lead to better understanding of life events and thus add to the feeling of aging with meaningful activities is still to be found out.

Objectives:

To explore how elderly amateurs experience participation in dance workshop

Methods:

Qualitative interviews analysed with an interpretative method based on narrative theory.

Thirteen persons, 63-89 years of age, were included in the study. They had participated in a dance project entitled "Movement as the memory of the body" led by the choreographer Efva Lilja. They were selected through an audition procedure. After performances had taken place a letter was sent to participants in which they were asked to be interviewed about the experiences of participating.

Results:

Results showed that the participants gained new insights about themselves and about certain life events by participating in the dance workshop. The Cartesian dualism separating body and mind was challenged as they became aware of the body-mind connection by doing movements that arose from the memory. Awareness of bodily movements being communicative also arose. Conclusion:

By expressing memories through bodily movements these participants formed consciousness of connection between body and mind. New ways of working with elderly to promote mobility and health can be invented by transferring the experiences of this project to rehabilitation settings.