The Experience of Movement: Therapeutic aspects of Dance

This presentation will focus upon the therapeutic application of dance and the arts in multiple populations including: individuals with Parkinson’s disease, individuals with physical disabilities, the elderly, children with learning disabilities, and others. Basic questions such as what dance “is”, its relevance in daily life activity/motion, and its qualitative aspects will be addressed. Relevant research will be presented referencing psycho-social benefits, and physical benefits, and this presentation can also have physical interactive/experiential elements depending upon the target audience.

Expanding Mobility Options for All: An Inclusive Approach to Design and Arts Participation

This presentation will focus upon the Dance/Mobility Chair Project, an arts initiative which has involved multiple collaborators including: the USF College of Engineering (http://rdc.arts.usf.edu), the USF School of Physical Therapy, and community partners, Custom Mobility, Inc. and Visual Realm, Inc. Goals of the project, design approach, context, outcomes thus far, and impact potential will be presented.

Individuals with disabilities have historically been limited by the societal lack of awareness or lack of attention to their specific mobility needs. In 1994, the US Federal Government formally recognized these limitations to quality of life through the enactment of Title III, the Americans with Disabilities Act.

As natural expressive outlets, performing arts venues have often embraced the unique needs of special populations, including the elderly and those with disabilities or illness. Within the dance domain, the integration of disabled individuals has occurred within professional dance companies, distinguishing themselves as "mixed ability" companies. Through the Dance/Mobility Chair Project, a patented, hands-free mobility chair has been designed and built to offer a beneficial mobility option to a variety of individuals with mobility needs to support inclusion efforts, and serve multiple contexts including: dance, sport, recreation, and daily living.

Overall goals of the Dance/Mobility Chair Project include:

1. Inclusion and Community Engagement:
   Increase participatory opportunities for individuals with differing ability levels in dance performances and recreational activities with the larger community.

2. Creativity and Innovation:
   Re-define and expand dance artistry, choreographic invention, and recreational opportunities; Challenge and expand technological design, invention, and application.

3. Education and Research:
   Utilize the interdisciplinary relationships and collaboration to create integrated and inclusive curricular approaches and opportunities; Challenge perceptions of dance/arts, technology, and disability.
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Biographical Information:

Merry Lynn Morris holds a Masters of Fine Arts degree in dance performance and choreography from Florida State University. She has been an instructor in the dance program for 13 years at the University of South Florida, in Tampa, FL. Ms. Morris seeks out interdisciplinary opportunities in which her movement background and expertise can be utilized and expanded. Her collaborative work crosses multiple disciplines including: Engineering, Physical Therapy, Architecture, Music, and Visual Art. She enjoys opportunities to utilize dance in diverse, integrative, and therapeutic ways. Ten years ago she began exploring the venue of mixed ability dance, and as caregiver to a disabled father over a 21 year period, her interest and awareness in disability needs has been ever-present. She has choreographed mixed ability pieces in the community and recent performance locations/events have included: the University of South Florida, the University of Tampa, the Museum of Science and Industry, and Ruth Eckerd Hall (REVolutions Dance/Tampa, FL).

In addition, Ms. Morris has created therapeutic movement/dance programs in assistive living facilities, and has recently begun working with a Parkinson’s support group to explore the benefits of dance for Parkinson’s Disease. Her dance/mobility chair project (http://rdc.arts.usf.edu) is an interdisciplinary project with the College of Engineering and involves approaching wheelchair design from a dance performance perspective to increase options for differently-abled individuals and expand perceptions regarding human mobility. The project has received national and international recognition and a patented chair prototype has been built. Ms. Morris continues to pursue research and study in the area of dance medicine/kinesiology and she is a member and regular presenter at the International Association of Dance Medicine and Science (IADMS).