



A closer look at the mental health benefits of folklórico.

Introduction

Dance

Definition of Dance	The Importance of Dance	Supporting Quote
The art of human movement by using rhythmic, musical, and expressive emotions.	Dance improves physical health, boosts mood, reduces stress, enhances self-expression, and builds social connections.	“Gradually I came to see that movement is one of the great laws of life. It is the primary medium of our aliveness, the flow of energy going on in us like a river all the time, awake or asleep, twenty-four hours a day. Our movement is our behavior; there is a direct connection between what we are like and how we move. Distortion, tension, and deadness in our movement is distortion, tension, and deadness in ourselves” (Whitehouse, 1969, p. 63).

Folklórico

Folklórico is a Mexican dance that originated from a blend of indigenous, Spanish, and African cultures (Frischia 2019); in fact, according to dance scholar and artistic director Gabriela Mendoza-Garcia, folklórico can be traced back to the Spanish conquestation (1525-1810). Since its origin, Folklórico has become a medium of dance rooted in cultural

tradition, community, and expression. In my project, I will dive deeper into this strand of dance and the benefits it grants participants.



My Story

The rhythmic sounds of *zapatillas* fill the room as a flamboyant display of skirts accompanies them. Every step taken by the dancers contributes to a heartbeat, which has become the language through which my identity connects with the world.

My journey with Folklórico began my freshman year in high school when an upperclassman encouraged me to join. I did not know it then, but joining would foster the first deep connection to dance I had experienced; one that would continue to unravel with each after-school practice session. At first, I felt like an indistinguishable participant, drawn to the graceful movement and the deep sense of tradition, but soon the rhythm of the dance began to pulse through my veins. By the end of our final performance that year, I bowed with pride and endless gratitude. That night, I was asked to be an officer, and I accepted with the determination to help others find that same pride.

Since then, I have built community through chaotic choreography sessions, the lingering scent of *cempasúchiles* after showcases, and teary hugs when someone stumbles on the dance floor. I've come to see dance as an experience of growth: vulnerability, cultural pride, and quiet leadership.

However, my senior year as President of the Folklórico ensemble comes with a bittersweet reality. Dance has taught me valuable leadership skills, such as how to collaborate, take initiative, and bring people together. Working alongside my peers has helped me foster strong social skills and a sense of camaraderie that I carry with me beyond the dance floor.

Alongside this, I’ve learned that folklórico is a bridge to my cultural roots. Each performance, especially in front of my family, fills me with a deep sense of pride and connection to my heritage. The moment I see my *mamá’s* eyes filled with adoration, I am reminded of the power dance has to keep the tradition alive and pass it from generation to generation.

Moreover, the unique dance community at my school creates an opportunity to exchange dances with other students, allowing each person to share the unique rhythms they grew up learning, and together, creating a tapestry of cultures. Through these collaborations, I’ve not only strengthened my own bond with my heritage but have also helped others embrace theirs.

In closing, dance has been a vehicle for me to express my culture, but it has also inspired me to help others express themselves and connect across cultural divides. As I look to the future, I see dance as a tool to bring people together, and whether through teaching folklórico or organizing community events, I am committed to ensuring that sense of connection and promoting cultural appreciation; in other words, **Apapachar in Rhythm**.



Apapachar

Apapachar Definition	Apapachar in Dance
Spanish verb from the Nahuatl word papacho, meaning to “caress with the soul.”	To embrace, comfort, and experience emotional connections through foot & skirt work.

Community

From my own personal experiences and from observing others in my dance group, it is evident that dance (specifically Folklórico) has a deep impact on individuals' lives and mental health. Through this small project, I hope others may read and find themselves encouraged to join a local community dance organization or club, or simply allow themselves to be immersed in dance at any social event they attend. Because dance isn't simply moving our bodies, but an emotional connection that brings embrace and comfort into our lives.

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