

# One step backward, two steps forward

Counseling professor traces path to partnership with WOU's Teaching Research Institute

By Erin Huggins



The new treatment used the language of energy and focused on the power of human touch.

Rosimery Bergeron, adjunct professor of rehabilitation counseling and a licensed professional counselor (LPC), was immediately hooked. "I am a play therapist. I am also a body psychotherapist. I am a play therapist, I am also a body psychotherapist. In Brazil, I was used to working with touching people," she explained.

Now, as a contractor with Western's Teaching Research Institute (TRI), Bergeron is implementing the treatment she found so intriguing—Qigong Massage—as part of an Autism Research study aimed at confirming the effectiveness of parent-administered massage.

"I train parents to do daily a patting massage - Qigong massage," Bergeron explained. This massage focuses on acupuncture points related to Autism

issues, like difficulties with language, communication, eye contact, and touch.

Total, the research, which began in November 2012, will involve 150 children over the next three years. For the first two years, participants will be children between the ages of two and six, 50 each year. The third year, researchers will focus on 50 children aged six to 11.

As one of 19 therapists involved in the research, Bergeron presently has trained six families at their homes in Salem, Ore. Through 20 sessions over a five-month period, she teaches the parents how to administer the 15-minute daily massage in a setting familiar to the child. The families commit to follow through with the research for a year. Thanks to a grant from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration, the treatment is free for participants.

It's harder for children with autism to process emotions, Bergeron said; "This massage helps them to calm down, to be in touch with their sensations." In addition, "children start to sleep better, [and] they reduce tantrums," she said.

Dr. Louisa Silva, lead researcher and trainer on the Qigong Sensory Training protocol, brought the Qigong massage therapy treatment to Oregon from Italy, where it had been used by parents of children with autism. She started incorporating Chinese medical techniques into her practice in 1990. In 2008, the QSTI was incorporated as a private non-profit. Silva's current project with the TRI, seeks to confirm the results of previous research, completed on a smaller scale in 2009.

"It's amazing. I love it," Bergeron said about the technique.

When Bergeron first heard about Silva's research, she was living in

Brazil where she was a self-employed licensed clinical psychologist and body psychotherapist. Due to the nature of having a private practice, she constantly looked for ways to improve herself. "I worked with Orgonotherapy [a type of body psychotherapy] in Brazil," Bergeron said.

Orgonotherapy works to restore physical and psychological health to clients by addressing underlying emotional and bioenergetic issues. For Bergeron, Qigong Massage, a therapy based on Chinese medicine and developed for early intervention for autism, seemed like a perfect fit.

Incidentally, professional and personal circumstances collided, facilitating a move to Oregon in 2009, when Bergeron planned to become a qualified therapist through the Qigong Sensory Training Institute (QSTI) before applying for the American LPC credentials. After that, she intended to keep working as a professional counselor—a job she'd been practicing for the last 20 years in Brazil.

"My goal was to continue to be who I am and to continue my professional life in private practice," she said. However, a change in LPC licensing protocol in January 2010, meant that in order for Bergeron to keep working as a professional counselor in private practice, she would first have to return to the basics.

"When I applied for the LPC to become licensed, I figured out I would have to have a master's degree in Oregon, recognized in the [United] States, even though I had already completed a graduate program in

clinical psychology in Brazil," she said.

Applying for and completing her master of science in rehabilitation counseling at WOU was a logical choice, Bergeron said. First, the program was accredited by the Council on Rehabilitation Education and recognized by the Licensed Professional Counselors and Therapists (LPC) board in Oregon. Secondly, it prepared her for the national Certified Rehabilitation Counselor exam, which is one of the national exams required to become a Licensed Professional Counselor. Beyond that, the rehabilitation training would expand her expertise, particularly in the field of disabilities and vocational counseling, and complement her interest in working with children with Autism.

"Everything was matching," she said.

Having completed the degree program, Bergeron sees multiple benefits: "I love the community. I've made friends...I identify myself professionally with the goals of this program."

While she did learn about cultural differences and American counseling procedures, the actual process of studying initially felt like several steps down the career ladder. The difficulty was not having my autonomy to work in private practice, becoming a student when I already had professional skills as a counselor," she said.

"The program was very supportive in understanding my circumstance and helping me to achieve my goals."

Ultimately, personal participation in the program provided another upward rung for Bergeron: "This degree allows me to teach, [and] I have great interest in helping

students to become counselors." She now teaches the practicum class and supervises current counseling students at WOU, affirmation of her professionalism and practical expertise. Completion of her master's degree in spring 2012 also allowed her to take the licensing exam and begin her private practice in Monmouth. Added to her contract work with the TRI Autism Research and her aspirations to become a trainer for Qigong massage therapists, Bergeron is well on her way back up the ladder—leading others to the same success.



Rosimery Bergeron is married to music professor Tom Bergeron. He teaches Brazilian music and she helps students with the Portuguese lyrics. "I also sing there, just for fun. It helps me a lot to maintain my culture," she said. "I have a very good connection there with students."