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# Dance therapy

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# Dance therapy

## **Abstract**

"The arts, often a source of joy and expression, have helped us to say what we could not say in words" says Fran Levy, who is a psychotherapist and creative arts therapist. Whether it is music or drama, art or dance, all of the arts can have implications for the counseling process. This project focuses specifically on Dance Movement Therapy. Dance/movement therapy has been developing ever since the early 1900s and it is based on the notion that mind and body are inseparable. (Levy 1)

DANCE THERAPY

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

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by

Darcy Gene Feuerbach

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## Abstract

“The arts, often a source of joy and expression, have helped us to say what we could not say in words” says Fran Levy, who is a psychotherapist and creative arts therapist. Whether it is music or drama, art or dance, all of the arts can have implications for the counseling process. This project focuses specifically on Dance Movement Therapy. Dance/movement therapy has been developing ever since the early 1900s and it is based on the notion that mind and body are inseparable. (Levy 1)

## Dance Therapy

Dance is found in nearly every culture if not all. Dance serves many purposes in every culture, but it often acts as a way of communicating. Communication may occur among people of a society or to one's own god or gods. Dance can also be a means for expressing and/or explaining concepts that are less manageable or difficult to describe through other means. In dance/movement therapy the goal is not to perform, but to create. (Brooke 95-96) "The aim is not to move more freely or more perfectly, which may be the aim of the therapeutic dance activities, but to use movement experimentation to explore new ways of being and feeling, and to gain access to feeling that cannot be verbalized." (Stanton-Jones, 1992, 3)

### *History*

Marian Chance is noted as one of the first dance therapists in the US. She foremost a dancer and teacher that soon observed the therapeutic and aesthetic value in dance and movement. In the 1940s she would dance with hospitalized psychiatric patients. (Wennerstrand 2) She worked mostly in groups and out of these, many dance-dramas originated. These groups offered patients a creative community where they could move and express often for the first time (Chodorow 30-31)

There are many other people that are noted in taking a hand in the development into what dance therapy is today. Irmgard Bartenieff (developed a series of corrective exercises that led to an approach for understanding the potential human body movement), Rudolf Laban (created a system for movement observation, analysis, and notation), were some important contributors from the direction of dance. Trudi Schoop, Mary

Whitehouse, Ted Shawn, Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Martha Graham are also contributors in the field (Chodorow 31-32).

From the counseling and psychiatry field, Freud, Adler, Jung and Rank are noted, but the most notably recognized contributions to dance therapy arrived from Reich, Sullivan and Jung (Chodorow 33). There obviously many others that made contributions to the field of dance/movement therapy. Today there are over 1000 registered dance/movement therapists in 46 states and about 30 different countries. It is still quite a small profession, but there are training schools in some states across the US that work towards the growth of individuals and programs related to dance therapy (Brooke 105).

### *Misconceptions*

Dance/movement therapy is not understood by everyone and there are some common misconceptions about the field. Some people think that it is only for use with populations that have physical impairments or that it is another form of occupational therapy. There are individuals who may be involved with dance/movement therapy that do have physical impairments, but it is not necessarily the reason they are being treated. Also, DMT has some history within occupational therapy settings, but it is not the typical case now and it is not the same form of therapy. Another misconception is that only people that have rhythmic and creative skill can participate, but this is not true, nearly anyone that can move their bodies at least some, can participate. Also, some assume that dance/movement therapy focus is on the execution of dance movements. The actual focus is more about the unconscious and symbolic aspects of communication. There are still others that assume that only individuals that are inexperienced with creative

expression should be referred to DMT. This may be true of a client, but it is not a requirement or a characteristic. (Payne 4-5)

### *Professional*

The American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) was formed in 1966 and modern dance/movement therapy is considered a serious and scholarly discipline. Therapists are graduates of masters' level programs. (Wennerstrand 2) These programs integrate the knowledge of dance and movement with DMT theory. The course requirements include the following areas: movement observation and assessment, group processes, research in psychopathology and diagnosis, as well as basic neuroscience. (Wennerstrand 2) After graduation from one of these programs, dance/movement therapists look for jobs in the field. Few dance/movement therapists have full-time jobs with sole title "dance/movement therapists." Most often they are working under another title like, therapeutic recreational specialist, mental health worker, as well as more oblique job classifications (Brooke 105).

### *Application*

Dance therapy is not the same as teaching dance; it is more about dancing "with" the client. Often the client will be the leader of movements and the therapist is there "with" the clients sensing and mirroring movements. This form of therapy, as with most therapies, will look different from one individual to the next, one group to another and one therapist to another. Some forms will be more direct with themes and guidance from the therapist, while others will be less direct. Leslie Daly, a dancer and dance/movement therapist says, "it works because it requires the therapist and the patient to be fully

present and engaged with one another, and it uses the body for information

(Wennerstrand 2).”

Dance/movement therapy is implemented with many different populations of people of all ages. It can be used with nearly anyone with any type of issues. Here are some special case examples that dance/movement therapy has been helpful with: eating disorders, autism, anxiety, dementia, sexual abuse, multiple personality disorder, trauma, attachment, blind, aging populations, addiction, borderline personality disorder, learning disabilities.

### *Conclusion*

Dance/movement therapy, as well as many of the other creative art therapies can be rather beneficial to the field of counseling. These can be used as the means to allow clients to express emotions and thoughts that they are unable or have difficulties expressing through words. DMT and counseling are both growing professions and will be interesting to see how dance and other creative arts are used to help clients in various ways.

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