
Global Certificate Course in Healing Through Dance Movement Therapy

History and Theoretical Foundations of Dance Movement Therapy

History of Dance Movement Therapy

Dance movement therapy (DMT) is a clinical and evidence-based use of dance and creative movement to support intellectual, emotional, and motor aspects of integrative health and wellness (American Dance Therapy Association, n.d.). The history of DMT can be traced back to ancient civilizations, such as Egypt, Greece, and India, where dance was used for healing, spiritual, and social purposes. However, it was not until the 20th century that DMT emerged as a distinct profession in the United States.

The pioneers of DMT, such as Marian Chace, Trudy Schoop, and Mary Whitehouse, developed their own approaches to using dance and movement as a therapeutic tool based on their backgrounds in dance, psychology, and education. In the 1940s and 1950s, they started to offer DMT sessions to patients with mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia, in hospitals and clinics. In 1966, the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) was founded to promote DMT as a legitimate and recognized profession.

Theoretical Foundations of Dance Movement Therapy

DMT is grounded in various theoretical frameworks, such as psychodynamic, humanistic, and systems theories. These theories provide a lens through which DMT practitioners understand and interpret the movement patterns and behaviors of their clients. Here are some of the key theoretical concepts in DMT:

Kinesthetic Empathy: the ability of the DMT practitioner to sense and resonate with the movement qualities and intentions of the client (Levy, 2010). Kinesthetic empathy allows the practitioner to establish a therapeutic relationship with the client and to facilitate the exploration and expression of emotions and experiences through movement.

Body Schema: the internal representation and organization of the body in space and time (Schilder, 1935). Body schema is a crucial concept in DMT because it reflects the client's body image, self-concept, and self-awareness. DMT practitioners use movement experiences to help clients modify and expand their body schema and to develop a more positive and integrated sense of self.

Developmental Movement Patterns: the sequential and hierarchical organization of movement skills and abilities that emerge in infancy and childhood (Hughes, 1998). Developmental movement patterns are a fundamental concept in DMT because they provide a basis for assessing and addressing the motor, cognitive, and emotional development of clients. DMT practitioners use movement experiences to facilitate the integration and maturation of developmental movement patterns and to support the overall growth and development of clients.

Movement Metaphor: the use of movement to symbolize and express abstract concepts and emotions (Levy, 2010). Movement metaphors are a powerful tool in DMT because they allow clients to communicate and explore complex and unconscious aspects of their experiences. DMT practitioners use movement metaphors to create a shared language and meaning with clients and to facilitate the therapeutic process.

Authentic Movement: a form of DMT that involves the client moving spontaneously and freely in the presence of a witness or therapist (Chodorow, 1991). Authentic movement is a therapeutic and spiritual practice that emphasizes the client's inner wisdom and intuition. DMT practitioners use authentic movement to help clients access and express their inner resources and to promote self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence.

Challenges and Applications of Dance Movement Therapy

DMT faces various challenges and limitations, such as limited accessibility, lack of awareness, and insufficient research evidence. However, DMT also offers various opportunities and benefits, such as nonverbal communication, embodied awareness, and creative expression. Here are some of the challenges and applications of DMT:

Accessibility: DMT is not widely available or affordable for many people, especially those who live in rural areas or low-income communities. DMT also requires specialized training and certification, which can be costly and time-consuming. Therefore, DMT practitioners need to find creative and innovative ways to increase the accessibility and affordability of DMT services.

Awareness: DMT is not well-known or understood by many people, including mental health professionals and the general public. Therefore, DMT practitioners need to engage in advocacy and education efforts to raise awareness and promote the value and effectiveness of DMT.

Research: DMT lacks sufficient research evidence to support its efficacy and effectiveness compared to other mental health interventions. Therefore, DMT practitioners need to conduct rigorous and high-quality research studies to establish the evidence base and credibility of DMT.

Nonverbal Communication: DMT uses nonverbal communication and expression as a primary mode of interaction and intervention. Therefore, DMT can be useful for clients who have difficulty verbalizing or articulating their thoughts and feelings, such as children, adolescents, and individuals with communication disorders.

Embodied Awareness: DMT promotes embodied awareness and mindfulness, which can help clients regulate their emotions and behaviors and improve their overall well-being. Therefore, DMT can be beneficial for clients who struggle with stress, anxiety, and trauma.

Creative Expression: DMT encourages creative expression and exploration, which can help clients tap into their imagination and creativity and foster their personal and artistic growth. Therefore, DMT can be appealing and meaningful for clients who are interested in dance, movement, and the arts.

Conclusion

DMT is a clinical and evidence-based use of dance and creative movement to support intellectual, emotional, and motor aspects of integrative health and wellness. DMT has a rich and diverse history and theoretical foundations that inform and guide its practice and application. DMT also faces various challenges and limitations but offers various opportunities and benefits for clients and practitioners. Therefore, DMT is a valuable and innovative approach to mental health and wellness that deserves further recognition and exploration.