Therapeutic Effects of Dance and Movement

Many styles of dance are characteristic of all our cultures past and present, not only as a form of relaxation or entertainment, but they also constitute part of important ceremonies, rituals and rites of passage. From ancient times healing powers have been attributed to dance and movement. In early civilizations dancing, religion, music and medicine were linked; dances were part of shamanic healing rituals and during the medieval era in Europe, people danced to avoid bubonic plague. The wild and abandoned tarantella dance of Italy is believed to have originated as a cure from the bite of the deadly tarantula spider.

Today’s dance and movement therapy (DMT), evolved from this traditional idea that dancing has the power to heal, and dance therapists use the power of dance and movement to help individuals access their own natural ability to heal and grow. Therapists are part of mental health professions, they participate in the psychotherapeutic use of movement and dance for emotional, cognitive, social, behavioral and physical conditions.

Along with music and art therapy, DMT is one of expressive arts, which can be a single specialization, or form part of a general expressive arts therapy programs that effectively treat a wide range of emotional and physical challenges including addiction. Dancing is a primal response to rhythm and music, so the dance therapist uses the dancer’s techniques to help patients to become more in touch with different physical and emotional dimensions of themselves using non-verbal, movement-oriented techniques. Patients are made aware of their feelings through sensation and movement, integrating body and mind. As it is non-verbal DMT can often overcome resistance to discussing emotionally charged issues that may be encountered in talk therapy.

Among the goals of dance therapy is to build the self-esteem and self-identity of client dealing with emotional issues. A premise of DMT is that the body and mind are interrelated, and that the state of the body can affect mental and emotional wellbeing both positively and negatively. In contrast to artistic dance, which is usually concerned with the aesthetic appearance of movement, dance therapy explores the nature all movement. Through observing and altering the kinesthetic movements of a client, dance movement therapists diagnose and help solve various psychological problems.

"DMT" is also founded on the principle that a vital connection exists between personality and the way in which one moves, and that changes in movement affects the emotional, intellectual, and physical health of the individual. It is practiced by trained dance and movement therapists who have earned a minimum of a master's degree and have met additional requirements established DMT is a body-based therapy grounded in the
relationship between physical movement and mental and emotional functioning, using movement analysis and dance techniques to enhance functioning.

As any conscious person can move on some level, this therapy can work in many different ways, in a variety of treatment settings and with different populations of all ages. DMT can be experienced in a group or individual session or used to enhance a verbally-oriented psychotherapy session, any population. Even standing still, sitting down, or moving hands in protest is considered an expression of movement in dance therapy. There are several different forms of application of dance therapy, including authentic movement, group work, individual clients, and individual forms generated by the therapist themselves.

Within a safe, therapeutic relationship DMT helps individuals express through movement and dance that which cannot be put into words. Research shows that many patients with for example body image or eating problems struggle with alexithymia, which is defined as difficulty in putting feelings and fantasies into words. The therapist helps the clients to pay attention to bodily-felt experience which have emotional significance leading them to experience, trust and know themselves in a safe un-traumatizing relationship with the therapist.

The California Institute for Human Science offers a graduate certification program in Expressive Arts Therapy that can also be incorporated in the Masters and PhD psychology programs. In addition it can be taken as an additional qualification for therapists wanting to expand their repertoire of therapies, with credits given for required psychology courses they have already completed.

As part of this program a course in Dance and Movement therapy in the fall quarter. The forty hour course can be audited for Continuing Education.

**Friday night 26 October, is being offered as a workshop.**

CE hours are available for the workshop and the for the first weekend for LCSWs & MFTs