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**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DANCE MOVEMENT THERAPY IN  
GENERAL AND CHILD THERAPY**

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*Abstract*

In an age where technology guides our lives, and with our increased ability to identify specific cognitive and behavioural processes in mental disorders, research-based therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) have seized an important position in the field of psychotherapy. Nevertheless, Dance Movement Therapy can still offer an important contribution to this field. Dance Movement Therapy was founded in the early 20th century as a profession based on the concept that body and mind are one inseparable system. Dance Movement Therapy conceives the body and its movement as a primary and vital component of human life. This unique attitude value is founded on the theory that the body is a means of communication and connection for a person with himself and with the environment. In this article, I describe the development of Dance Movement Therapy, indicating its importance in the field of therapy in general and with children in particular. This review will not explore CBT, but will refer to contribution in the guidance of workshops that study Dance Movement Therapy combined with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). This article will show that Dance Movement Therapy can be used as treatment especially in the case of children with emotional disturbances.

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**Keywords:** Dance Movement Therapy, psychotherapy, Child Therapy, CBT.



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## **1. Introduction**

With the development of technology and the development of innovative contemporary approaches in psychotherapy, movement therapy has been pushed to the margins. In this article, I relate to the roots of Dance Movement Therapy and its principles in order to indicate that it should be a leading field and receive renewed status in the field of psychotherapy and child therapy.

The literature on which the article is based was written by movement therapists, the pioneers, their successors and new researchers in the field.

This article therefore aims to remind us why movement therapy is so relevant in the present era and to investigate whether Dance Movement Therapy can be innovative while maintaining the important principles of this therapeutic approach.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Dance Movement Therapy is a branch of the expressive and creative therapies that offer the use of artistic tools for therapeutic interventions. It is one of the creative art therapies alongside music, drama and arts therapies.

### **2.1. Dance Movement Therapy**

The roots of Dance Movement Therapy stem from ancient tribal traditions. The use of dance as a ritual for healing and as a way of expressing emotions has been known from the inception of human history (Chodorow, 1991). There is evidence of cultures in which dance was a substantial and significant part of tribal culture and constituted the main tool for the expression of emotions, blending with nature and healing that was performed by the shaman (Levy, 1992). In many primitive societies, dance was no less essential than eating and sleeping. It gave people a means to express themselves, to transmit their feelings to others and to bond with nature (Levy, 1988). In these societies, dance ceremonies accompanied significant life events and thus contributed both to interpersonal integration and to the integration of the individual with their environment. From this aspect dance movement can be seen as a therapeutic tool in these societies (Fein, 2004).

Historically, the roots of Dance Movement Therapy can be found at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when there was a distancing from the limitations of verbal psychotherapy lacking movement towards therapy whose substance was more natural and liberated. In parallel, there was increasing interest among psychotherapists in the expressive and non-verbal aspects of personality. Out of this complex therapeutic atmosphere, in 1940, a new stream of Dance Movement Therapy was born (Levy, 1992). This new trend in treatment was founded on the understanding that movement is a primary and basic part of our experience as humans. Two important elements – movement and breathing, indicate the beginning of life, and even advance language and thought. Gestural movements appear immediately after birth as a function of the human need for communication (Chaiklin, 2009).

Dance movement therapy began to develop in the USA and later in Europe. The birth of this profession was facilitated due to cooperation between psychiatrists and psychologists and professionals from the world of dance, who pointed up the potential embodied in movement (Shahar Levy, 1989). At this

stage dance therapy was significantly influenced by modern dance and most of the pioneers in movement therapy were dancers or dance teachers.

One of the outstanding contributors to the development of Dance Movement Therapy as a profession was Marion Chace, a dancer and dance teacher, who began her therapeutic career in the 1940s with the staff of the St. Elizabeth psychiatric hospital. She and her students developed work methods and concepts that became the foundation of Dance Movement Therapy (Shahar Levy, 1989). Chace described what appeared to be mysterious "basic dance", movements and poses, which often appear in psychotic patients and also in others as "the externalization of inner feelings that cannot be expressed in rational speech and can be shared only through rhythmic and symbolic acts" (Chace, 1975, p. 203). She developed ways to make contact with these people by joining in with their movements. Chace mainly worked through group Dance Movement Therapy. The main and basic concept was that dance is a form of communication, a tool for expression, and as such it plays a significant humane role (Chaiklin, 1975). Dance Movement Therapy has a strong presence in institutional settings of different types, but there is also a stable tradition of therapeutic work in contexts of personal development and growth. In the USA, there was a split between Psychiatric Movement Therapy on the East Coast and the West Coast genre founded by Mary Whitehouse.

Developing from Jung's theory, Whitehouse formed a theoretical model for movement therapy known as "Authentic Movement" based on Jung's notion of "moving imagination" (Chodorow, 1994). Whitehouse emphasized the affinity between spontaneous movement in her work and Freud's psychoanalytical model that sees a sequence of associations as an expression of subconscious mental contents. In work with body movement these contents are expressed through movement instead of words and sentences that compose the sequence of associations in standard psychoanalytical therapy. Like Chace, Whitehouse noticed a connection between movement and symbols; she emphasized the connection between movement and what it symbolized.

Trudy Schoop (1974) who also worked in psychiatric institutions said that the purpose of Dance Movement Therapy is to provide subjective emotional conflicts with an objective physical form, a form that enables the conceptualization of conflicts in order to solve them in an effective manner.

In that same period, in which dance movement therapy began to establish itself, interesting developments were taking place in psychology, with psychoanalytical influences of professionals such as: Reich, Jung and Sullivan. Wilhelm Reich, an Austrian psychiatrist and psychoanalyst was one of the first clinicians with a non-verbal orientation. He employed muscle activation to overcome people's tendency to enclose themselves within a virtual armor to help them release repressed mental contents (Levy, 1988).

The profession of Dance Movement Therapy became institutionalized in the USA. The "second generation" of pioneers decided to establish the American Association of Movement and Dance Therapy that operates until today. The students of Mary Whitehouse, such as Joan Chodorow and the students of Marion Chace such as Sharon Chaiklin, pressured their teachers to establish a body that would unite movement and dance therapists. According to its definition the American Association of Movement and Dance Therapy is based on the empirically supported premise that the body, mind and spirit are interconnected. The American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA, 2016) defines dance/movement therapy as the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive and physical integration of the individual.

The above-mentioned basic assumption of Dance Movement Therapy regarding the connection between body and soul is based on the use of elements from modern psychotherapeutic based on the works of Sigmund Freud (Chodorow, 1991). Freud (1923) noted: "the ego is primarily a physical ego ... the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly those springing from the surface of the body" (p.26).

Professional therapists have tried to understand the substance of Dance Movement Therapy. Its founders came from modern dance characterized by a direct expressive style of movement. In their work, these founders distanced themselves as far as possible from what was known as dance and moved more and more in the direction of "spontaneous movement". The purpose of movement in this case is to allow people to express their inner emotional world. The aspiration in Dance Movement Therapy is not to move freely or perfectly but rather to use physical abilities to reveal new paths of experience and feeling and even to expose feelings that are not expressed in speech. Thus, movement therapy should be seen as a process and not a product, when psychological internalization stems from movement and from information that arises in the therapeutic connection (Stanton-Jones, 1992).

Dance therapy does not only relate to a person's feelings, but also to the manner and time in which these feelings are mentally and physically processed (Siegel, 1995). Yona Shahar Levy (1989) bases her approach in the field of Dance Movement Therapy on the assumption that the body and soul are components of a single whole system. She sees the movement that is awakened in people as an inseparable part of any emotional experience or of any external behavior, whether conscious or subconscious. The strong connection between body and soul leads to the assumption that through the physiological channel, it is possible to touch upon psychological components that are not accessible through the verbal channel. Levy (1989) composed the rationale of Dance Movement Therapy based on a holistic basic assumption that "since the body and soul are a single system, it is also possible to enlist the tools and strengths of the physiological system for mental disturbances and movement plays a key role in the mental system" (p.25). From all the above-said it can be understood that movement and dance therapy deal with relationships, emotional expression and integration of the self.

Relying on these assumptions it can be understood why Dance Movement Therapy emphasizes and is based on the primitive ability of man to move. The therapeutic frame allows expression and emotional sharing for people who do not feel comfortable using the verbal channel. The creativity involved in movement provides people with the ability to create new structures that express what it is difficult for them to articulate.

Many dance movement therapists have tried to find a theoretical basis in different therapeutic ways. Bernstein (1979) identified eight different theoretical approaches to Dance Movement Therapy, including the Freudian, Jungian, Gestalt and Transpersonal Approaches. The work of body-focused psychotherapists such as Reich and Luhan is often cited by authors in this field, some of whom claim that movement therapy is equal in value to other forms of therapy. "In coping with the unconscious, dance movement therapy is a profound approach that does not differ in substance from other therapies. It simply uses another characteristic of the body: its movement" (Siegel, 1984, p. 7).

Nevertheless, at a deeper level it is clear that Dance Movement Therapy is based on an autonomous sense of the role of movement in an individual's life. Or as Stanton-Jones (1992) noted, in movement therapy the therapist understands the movement and the manner in which it transmits meaning through its

qualities in space, through weight, time, flow and of course the rhythm, the form and symbolic contents. This understanding is transmitted by the therapist to the client both through verbal and interpretative remarks and through non-verbal reactions.

Stanton-Jones (1992) identified five essential theoretical principles of movement therapy that in her opinion were valid for all the different forms of work. These principles indicate that (1) the body and soul are in a perpetual relationship one with the other, (2) movement reflects personality, (3) the connection between the therapist and the client has central importance, (4) the unconscious can be revealed through movement and improvisation and (5) a therapeutic element is embodied in movement. The last principle is perhaps the most important of all, the sense that if a person can be stimulated to move in a spontaneous manner that will arouse their healing process.

Whatever the theoretical approach that leads to a distinction between the practical works of the different types of therapist, the common denominator for all therapists is that Dance Movement Therapy is the main communication tool and with the help of the body people are able to express deep emotions and to communicate with them, in order to help to produce a change process.

## **2.2. Dance movement – Child therapy**

In parallel to the work of Chace other types of Dance Movement Therapy were developed for different types of population, such as the treatment of children with emotional disturbances.

Children act and communicate in their daily lives through their bodies, movement and play. The beginning of a human's development is characterized by uncoordinated motor activity. Over time, the child learns to control its gross movements. An intellectual process of learning and communication gradually develops, such that the language of words is a translation of primary processes (Chaiklin, 1975). Thus, the child therapist needs to pay attention to non-verbal contents transmitted through the child's movements, and also to the internal contents that emerge from play and from the way in which the child plays. Consideration of these elements can create a fuller and more accurate picture of the client's world. The therapist can communicate with the child through non-verbal means in play and movement in more appropriate ways.

According to Whitehouse, children express themselves through their bodies many years before they express themselves through verbal language and so movement enables them to express memories stored in the body from pre-verbal periods (Levy, 1992). Movement helps children with behavioral disorders (Leventhall, 1980).

Since children communicate in non-verbal ways even before they learn to speak, pre-verbal memories caught in the body can be analyzed to understand pre-verbal traumas from early childhood (LeMessureir & Loman, 2008). Yona Shahar Levy calls these memories "early memory replays". LeMessureir and Loman discuss several techniques of child movement therapy and show how these techniques can help children in early childhood to solve communication difficulties, to improve self-regulation, to express emotions through non-verbal means, to process unresolved issues in their development and to heal traumas and loss. The theoretical frame that they present combines developmental and relational approaches.

Rena Kornblum, (2008) saw Dance Movement Therapy as a process that enables access to the child's deepest feelings as part of the developmental system. Kornblum adopted the basic assumption that there is

a connection between the way in which we move and our feelings and she noted that changes in the level of movement can also cause changes in emotional and mental levels. The goals that Kornblum develops in her work are based on psychoanalytical development stages and the principles of client-focused therapy.

### **3. Research Questions**

I have been a Dance Movement therapist in the education system for over 20 years, working with children with special needs and have mentored Dance Movement therapists. The body's role and movement in therapy constitutes an important issue when considering different interventions in the therapy course.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

I have discovered possible connections between the principles of this approach and Dance Movement Therapy, whereby each approach enriches and supplements the other. The basic model of CBT includes three components which interact with reciprocal interaction: thoughts, emotions and actions. A person's thoughts influence the way in which they feel and the way in which they behave. In contrast to the past, present-day psychotherapeutic approaches attribute significance to an additional component: the physiological component (Crick & Dodge, 1994).

Many theorists in the field of Dance Movement Therapy base their work on the outlook of psychoanalysis, but not many have attempted to do this through CBT. To address this gap in knowledge, I have begun studying the connection between Dance Movement Therapy and CBT through therapy and mentoring.

### **5. Research Methods**

This study has led to the presentation of lectures at the annual 'Yahat' (The Israeli Association of Creative & Expressive Therapies) conferences and at the 'Psagot' institute of the Open University. I have also conducted workshops experimenting with movement opened up to CBT. In these workshops, we employed movement and body experiences, anchored in the "body" of CBT, yet without minimizing the role of the movement therapists, since it was recognized that there is a need to always leave a channel open to "converse" with the body. Therapists experience reciprocal interaction between body, thought (a significant component of CBT) and emotion through movement. The sessions were structured, with a focused and goal-oriented approach: therapy through cognitive-behavioral movement.

### **6. Findings**

The workshops aroused much interest among therapists. At some moments, it seemed that the approaches complemented each other and created an effective and appropriate response for the client and at other moments it seemed that there was a contradiction between the approaches. It was found that there were some therapists who integrated both approaches in their work, and many questions arose regarding the substance of the connection between the approaches and whether such a combination was possible, questions that led me to continue my enquiry.

## 7. Conclusion

Dance Movement Therapy is one of the group of art therapies. This is an emotive therapy combining the creative and expressive aspects that characterize dance movement with the insights of psychotherapy. The movement therapist combines verbal and non-verbal means in order to enable the client to attain a more realistic body image and through these achievements to feel relief, pleasure and integration.

The movement therapist sees the body as both a diagnostic and therapeutic tool, based on the understanding that the body holds fascinating tales of our lives, which can be reached through movement and dance.

This theoretical review described and clearly illustrate the ways in which dance and movement plays an integral role in our life. It also noted the significant role that dance can play for all of us, whether through dance as therapy, dance as entertainment or dance with therapeutic implications, such as release or catharsis.

To be a Dance Movement therapist means observing, considering, understanding and reacting through the body, movement and dance. Insofar as this conservative attitude is maintained then this field will be preserved. On the other hand, a large part of the progress in psychotherapy has evolved thanks to the existence of therapists who dared to initiate, to innovate, create, and examine the boundaries and norms of their therapeutic approaches. Dance Movement Therapy based on CBT is another way to preserve the qualities of Dance Movement Therapy and yet to innovate and to integrate CBT approaches that have been shown to be effective

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