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Can psycho-social benefits be observed in those with intellectual disabilities during DMT?

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

May 5th, 2023

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Dance/Movement Therapy

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Abstract

Often training and learning opportunities ignore the unique needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Helping this population cope with problems that will occur in their lives could increase their feelings of well-being and might decrease feelings of isolation. This workshop used the techniques from Mary Starks Whitehouse's practice of Authentic Movement (Whitehouse et al., 1999) to support participants' emotional self regulation during training for a new job at an apple orchard. The use of Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) as an intervention for individuals with intellectual disabilities could increase coping skills, which could create greater opportunities for them to increase their overall feeling of well-being. The workshops were conducted at an apple orchard that hires adult individuals with intellectual disabilities using DMT therapy-inspired techniques as a vehicle to explore the theme of change in the workplace. Results suggested that dance and movement techniques helped employees embody change and assisted in self regulation during training. Future research should include more research on DMT as an intervention for adults with intellectual disabilities so therapists can better support them throughout the entirety of their lives.

The author identifies as a straight, cisgender, neurotypical white woman, from a middle class midwestern family background.

Can Psycho-social Benefits Be Observed In Those With Intellectual Disabilities During DMT?

Individuals with intellectual disabilities have the same needs for social support as neurotypical individuals but can have more difficulty in finding ways to connect with their communities, which may impact their ability to cope with problems that they face as part of their life. Psycho-social benefits of good coping skills include, but are not limited to a feeling of well-being, enhanced mood, reduced stress, and reduced anxiety (Barnet-Lopez et al., 2016). Dance movement therapy (DMT) has often been used to promote the learning development and well-being of children and adults with intellectual disabilities (Albin, 2016). The use of DMT as an intervention for individuals with intellectual disabilities could increase coping skills in individuals with intellectual disabilities, which could create greater opportunities for them to increase their overall feeling of well-being (Albin, 2016). This is an important topic to examine as there are over 7 million people with intellectual disabilities in the United States (The Arc, 2014) and helping this population cope with problems that will occur in their lives could increase their feeling of well-being and might decrease feelings of isolation (The Arc, 2014).

In completing this community engagement project, I desired to learn whether DMT would be an effective tool in helping individuals with intellectual disabilities acclimate to a new working environment and learn new job skills. I hoped to find that DMT sessions, as part of the training curriculum for their new role at an apple orchard, would help both the staff and workers in training self-regulate when they are feeling anxious or frustrated while working at their new job. I also hoped to find that the same self-regulation tools, when taught to the executive director and staff, would help them be better able to support the employees both socially and emotionally.

I expected that these skills would create a common non-verbal language that both staff and employees could use during times of high stress to help them acclimate to their new roles.

I have worked with individuals with intellectual disabilities since I graduated from my undergraduate program in 2018. I have worked with this population in various ways such as being a direct support caregiver, job coach, paraprofessional, and a behavioral technician. I also have a connection with this population on a personal level as I have a couple family members who have been diagnosed with an intellectual disability. While this gives me experience working with this population it may also cause some biases on how I see this population or how I work with them.

Literature Review

In my literature review, I approached the community engagement project with the assumption that strategies that have worked for children with intellectual disabilities would work for adults with intellectual disabilities. This assumption was needed because research on the impact of DMT for individuals with intellectual disabilities has been limited and research that has been completed focused primarily upon children. Though most of the studies that have been completed involve children with intellectual disabilities as their key subjects, the number of studies is still very small (Barnet-López et al., 2015) compared to other therapeutic formats and populations. This means that there is a gap in the research for both adolescents and adults as it relates to the effectiveness of DMT. Based on the findings by Crisan, (2021) a second assumption in my project is that DMT strategies that are used to improve well-being in neurotypical adults would also be effective when used with adults with intellectual disabilities

As I was researching this topic and creating the project, I used techniques from Mary Starks Whitehouse's practice of Authentic Movement (Whitehouse, M.S. et al., 1999). Given the nature of this project being a community engagement project, there will be no true form of therapy provided; however, it is important to look at other therapy resources to inform the building of the project and methods used within it.

In the literature review, the findings pointed to the psycho-social benefits of dance and movement therapy (Crisan, 2021). I have learned that movement, paired with learning, can increase the retention of the information by participants but can also increase their feelings of well-being by increasing confidence and reducing anxiety (Crisan, 2021). These changes increase the feeling of well-being and enhance the mood of participants.

I reviewed the existing literature that explores intellectual disabilities and the topics of well-being, learning, identity development, physical activity, motivation, and goal setting. According to Hens and Dunphy (2020) when dance has been used as an element of a learning activity, it helps people to learn new skills. When applied to a population with intellectual disabilities, this learning could be the support that they need to be successfully employed (The Arc, 2014).

History

In the not-too-distant past, it was a common practice for families to place a child who was born with an intellectual disability into an institution and never see their families again, often living separate lives (Dunphy, 1999). One could assume that all the members of the family may have suffered, but it was likely especially hard on the child with intellectual disabilities who

would not have understood why they were separated from their family. Currently, it is a common practice for families to raise their child who has an intellectual disability within the family home, integrating them into normal, everyday activities such as school, work, and community life. This integration of individuals with disabilities into everyday life events created a need for support for them and for their caregivers so that this integration would be successful for the individual with intellectual disabilities. There are many supports that are now available for this population and there are many more that are currently forming as research indicates new ways to support the population in successful integration (The Arc, 2014). One of these emerging supports is DMT (Dunphy, 1999). DMT can be applied in a non-therapeutic environment to help teach new skills to individuals with intellectual disabilities that will help them navigate the emotions that arise when learning those skills (Dunphy, 1999).

Well-being

DMT has been shown to positively affect the general population's well-being as well as those who have intellectual disabilities (Crisan, 2021). Well-being is an important element of feeling satisfaction with life (Barnet-Lopez et al., 2016). Many people with intellectual disabilities experience feelings of isolation and face discrimination when they are interacting with the world (The Arc, 2014). Many of them enjoy being employed (The Arc, 2014). Helping them navigate the transition into employment successfully could increase their ability to hold employment long-term which is an element that increases a sense of well-being (The Arc, 2014). According to Barnet-Lopez et al. (2016), changes in the well-being of adults with intellectual disabilities before and after a DMT program can be observed. Their study compared the results of an intervention group (IG) ($n = 30$) and a control group (CG) ($n = 30$). The Koppitz

human figure drawing (HFD) test was used for both the IG and the CG at the beginning of the study and three months after the program. The IG had two one-hour DMT sessions per week for a three-month period. Sessions included check-in, warm-up, transition process, and check-out. Descriptive and inferential analysis of the variables were conducted.

Participants who took part in the DMT showed a significant improvement in emotional well-being between pre-test and post-test ($p = 0.007$) (Barnet-Lopez et al., 2016). Between pre-test and post-test for the CG, no differences were found ($p > 0.560$). To assess emotional well-being, the HFD test was used, asking participants to draw a whole person. The HFD is a validated non-verbal instrument that allows expressing emotions. The study has construct validity as the HFD measure is clearly defined, standardized, and valid. The results indicated that there was a significant improvement in emotional well-being when DMT is used as an intervention (Barnet-Lopez et al., 2016). The research from this study shows that participants who participated in their group DMT study showed significant positive improvement on self-concept, interpersonal relationship, self-confidence, anxiety, and self-awareness within their bodies (Barnet-Lopez et al., 2016). In their findings from the study Barnet-Lopez stated that DMT is a program that has been empirically shown to improve emotional well-being of those with ID because it increases their quality of life. This study has applicability to my project in that it indicates that DMT has been effective in working with groups to help them with feelings that would arise when learning new skills for a new job like anxiety, interpersonal relationships, and self-concept.

In another study, Amanda Gordon (2014) researched positive affect in DMT. In her research, she met with a small group of participants who were all dance therapists and asked them questions about their therapeutic interventions, therapeutic intentions and goals, client

attributes, and therapist attributes as they related to positive affect in their work with clients. In this study, she found that the therapist's attitude and observation of the client had a significant impact on positive affect in the client. Additionally, she found that positive affect was greatly impacted by the therapist supporting the client in accepting positive feedback about themselves and the work that they were doing. This had an impact on the community engagement project that I did because how the therapist understands and communicates with the client has an impact on how the client feels about themselves. This can impact their ability to experience challenges in a positive way. I followed a positive affect within my community engagement project so that I was able to help the new employees interact in a new environment and work through the challenges that they will feel as they are learning new job skills.

Learning

There are many different methods of learning new skills and retaining the information necessary to repeat these new skills. Many times, learning methods benefit neurotypical individuals the most and don't take into consideration the ID population and the ways in which they learn most effectively. Often, strategies that employ either music or dance are helpful for children with ID to improve their ability to learn (Surujlal, 2013). A study from North-West University in Vanderbijlpark, South Africa (Surujlal, 2013) interviewed three focus groups from two different schools to examine the contributions of music and dance to improving classroom learning in children with intellectual disabilities. The interviewees were recruited through purposive sampling. A phenomenological approach was chosen for data collection. The data were collected through semi-structured focus group interviews. Transcript data was then reviewed using interpretive phenomenological analysis. Each transcript was read and reread, and

notes were taken to establish similarities and differences within the data and then themes within the text were developed. In this study, Surujlal found that dance and music have made a contribution to improving the learning experience for children with intellectual disabilities. This study was helpful in creating my project because it pointed to the fact that children with ID have different learning styles and that learning can be increased using music or dance. In my project, I assumed that methods that work for children with ID will work for adults with ID and this study supports that DMT would be helpful in the employees learning new information.

Researchers (Fotiadou et al., 2017) at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, in Greece, examined the effect of psychomotor education programs on the static balance of children with intellectual disabilities. The study compared the results of an intervention group (IG) ($n = 10$) and a control group (CG) ($n = 10$). The IG was assessed before and after a 16-week psychomotor education program. The CG was assessed before and after a 16-week period. Both groups were assessed using Griffiths No. II scale of gross motor development and were measured for static balance ability using an electronic pressure platform.

An independent t-test was used to examine differences between the first and last measurements of the IG and CG (Fotiadou et al., 2017). A paired t-test was used to examine the differences between the first and last measurements for each group. Individuals with intellectual disabilities' static balance scores were compared before and after balance exercises. On average, participants performed worse before ($M = 53.80$, $SD = 6.23$) than after balance exercises ($M = 64.20$, $SD = 8.01$). This improvement, 10.4, was statistically significant, $t(18) = 4.02$, $p \leq 0.05$ pre to post-test. No statistically significant difference was found between pre- and post-measurements for the CG. The study does not have strong external validity as the study sample was small ($N = 20$). The study has construct validity as the competency being measured, static

balance, was clearly defined and the instruments used in the study were standardized and valid. In my project, the employees are completing physically demanding work compared to other jobs that they could have. There is a lot of reaching over their heads to pick apples, and they must walk long distances on uneven terrain, sometimes carrying tools or baskets, across that landscape. They will need to build muscle over time and build endurance for the work that needs to be done. This study indicates that introducing DMT into their training program can help employees improve their balance which will be important for their success and job satisfaction within their new role.

In her study, Crisan (2021) interviewed parents of individuals with ID who visited one of three day centers for young adults and adults with Down syndrome and also with staff members of these facilities. The questions centered around the impact of dance classes, exercise classes and expressive therapies that were offered at these centers on the clients who used the facilities, specifically in the areas of social skills, self-esteem, communication skills, learning and discipline. Crisan found that dancing had positive effects on all the areas she was studying. The study had some limitations in that none of the individuals with Down syndrome were interviewed to get their feedback on the effects of the classes, but those interviewed saw a strong motivation within participants to attend the classes and saw improvement in their social skills. Crisan found that dance lessons offered participants the opportunity to work at a skill and test their personal limits in a positive way. They found that dancing is an educational situation that involves several aspects so that the participant can learn how to combine psychomotor, social, and cultural development all in the same experience (Crisan, 2021). In this study, the theme that was mentioned repeatedly was how much participants enjoyed learning when dance was involved. Classrooms were full on days when dance was being taught. This study has impact on

my project in that people learn more easily when they are having fun, even if that is only because they are willing to come back again because they are enjoying themselves. At the apple orchard, this will be an important element as returning employees will be good for the overall success of the business and my project will explore which methods are the most effective in ensuring that employees are enjoying the process of training.

Identity development

Often, individuals with ID face challenges in identity development. In her study, Allen (2019) conducted an Arts-Based Research project to examine ways critical disability studies and art can facilitate identity development in people with disabilities. The goal was to give the disabled population voice and visibility to change the narrative of how disabled people are represented and to introduce social justice practices into educational settings by establishing disability identity. Allen combined journaling, drawing, watercolor, and sculpture to explore their own disability experience within an arts-based journal used for data collection using arts-based reflexivity. Allen created artwork that combined the themes of fluidity, identity, disability as metaphor/deficit, and the complex nature of uncovering. An exhibition space was created at a local art gallery to allow for reflection through experiencing the artwork to determine how disability identity development could be implemented in current ableist art education.

In analyzing the arts-based journal, Allen found that metaphor was used to represent the disability, making it seem a form of deficit. Generating artwork gave the researcher insight into the disability experience and the changeable nature of identity. The implications of these findings are that disability identity can be used in art education to create a sense of identity that traditional ableist art education lacks. Arts-Based Research can assist people with disabilities in accessing

feelings about their disability or the ways that those without disabilities interact with them improving their self-esteem and identity. This article indicates that the arts are a method that can be used to help communicate feelings and improve quality of life as evidenced by improvement in self-esteem. In my project, positive employee self-identity is a key outcome requested by the executive director. This study indicates that the arts are an effective method of expression that also can improve self-esteem and identity. This study also indicates that within my project, exercises can be established that will help participants create their identity as they face and overcome challenges at work.

According to Hens and Dunphy (2020), DMT is a therapeutic medium that focuses on the body/movement instead of relying on just verbal communication like many other therapeutic mediums such as traditional talk therapy. This is extremely beneficial for the ID population as it allows accessibility to the ID population who are either non-verbal or have delayed speech to explore their identity development with movement. Additionally, being able to be understood in a non-verbal way by both the dance therapist and the staff members trained by the dance therapist will help employees feel supported in their process of identity development.

In a study completed by researchers in Barcelona Spain, (Barnet-López et al., 2015). participants with intellectual disabilities were given a Human Figure Drawing test prior to a series of DMT sessions and then again after sessions that took place over a 3-month period were completed. The results of the study indicated that therapy programs, like DMT, where body expression has an essential role, may encourage participants to be in contact with and better understand their own bodies.

They also found that the use of DMT allowed researchers a way to explore communication through nonverbal movement and expression (Barnet-López et al., 2015). For

my project, the ability to communicate non-verbally both to the employees and from the employees was a helpful tool for the success of their training. It also supports that this could be an ongoing method to help communicate between staff and employees, creating a common language that they both understand.

Physical activity

According to Albin (2016) one of the main reasons that children with ID do not participate in physical activities or exercise is because there are little to no developmentally appropriate opportunities near them. Albin (2016) wrote that finding different forms of therapeutic methods that involve movement is important for children with ID as they offer more opportunities for physical activity which is an important part of their development. Since physical activity is not something that has been made accessible to children with ID due to them not being made developmentally appropriate for ID students, most of the teacher's attention will go to the neurotypical students because that is who the activities are made for. This leaves children with ID having the impression that exercise is not something that they could or should do. This then carries on into adulthood, leading to all the health issues associated with sedentary lifestyle (Albin, 2016).

The employees at the apple orchard are doing physical labor, which may have been new for some of the employees. DMT has the benefit of promoting physical activity within those who participate, normalizing the daily use of their body for work and expression. According to The Arc, (2019) DMT can help individuals improve their strength, balance, and muscle coordination.

Motivation and goal setting

Finding motivation for physical activity is something that affects every population. According to Lirola et al. (2020) the ID population struggles more than other populations with finding the motivation to be physically active due to the lack of developmentally appropriate groups being available to them. Many individuals with ID live sedentary lifestyles due to a lack of motivation (Lirola et al., 2020). It is important to implement certain elements in physical activities for this population that will help motivate them to continue physical activity. Expressing oneself through their body is one of the tools that best promotes integration and inclusion of individuals with ID into groups and can be helpful in different contexts and environments in helping people with ID feel like they are part of the group (Lirola et al., 2020). According to Lirola et al (2020) some of the elements of self-expression through the body, such as dance, can increase motivation and encourage attendance at sports/physical activities practice in individuals with ID. This attendance at practices related to physical activity also helps build social relationships and increase the strength of those social relationships. In addition, these activities reduce communication barriers and social barriers commonly experienced by individuals with ID. The reduction in barriers allows for participation by individuals with ID and allows for greater inclusion of the population with ID.

A study was conducted at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon (Dixon-Ibarra et al., 2017) to determine if assisting staff in creating physical activity goals for residents with intellectual disabilities would help to incorporate physical activity into the group home schedule. Twelve interview participants, including both staff and residents, were selected from the group home agency across five different states where the agency operated.

Data collection was through face-to-face interviews with participants. To avoid coercion, interviews were conducted away from superiors or caregivers. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, contained semi-structured questions, and lasted for 10-15 minutes. Analysis of the interviews to establish themes was completed through an inductive process of reviewing interview transcripts to identify patterns and themes. Data were organized into six themes including program training, implementation, physical activity, barriers, facilitators, and feedback. A limitation of the study was that not all staff used components of the program for resident motivation due to lack of time and due to lack of staff motivation to use the materials. They list that another limitation of the study is that there was not sufficient support from the organization to ensure materials were simple and easy to use by the staff. Regardless of inconsistent program use by the staff, all the residents interviewed wanted to continue the program to pursue more physical activity. When physical activity is enjoyable, like in DMT, participants are likely to stick with it and enjoy all the health benefits of a more active lifestyle.

From the literature review, I learned that DMT has a positive impact on an individual's sense of well being and that the therapist has a significant impact on the benefit that the client receives through DMT. This impact is predominantly in the area of the therapist's attitude and observation of the client. This taught me that my attitude is a critical component of the impact of my community engagement project and something that I should track in my journal. From the literature review, I learned that individuals with intellectual disabilities learn best when there is music or dancing involved. Dancing involves the body and movement and encourages accessibility to those who are non-verbal or have delayed speech. This makes DMT a great medium for working with individuals with ID. DMT, when geared to the ID population, can

encourage participants to learn how to feel more comfortable with and in their body. Since it is presented in a fun and accessible way, participants are more likely to be motivated to continue with the practices. All of these main points that I learned during my literature review became key components of my community engagement project.

Methods

I contacted a not-for-profit organization that is in my community and partnered with them by offering dance and movement to the employees of their not-for-profit. This company is an urban orchard that has employees who are individuals with intellectual disabilities. They also have a few staff members who do not have intellectual disabilities. I offered dance movement workshops as a way to help create a community within the non-profit employees and also to help those employees with intellectual disabilities release feelings of anxiety or frustration that might have come up while they were learning new skills.

In engaging with this not-for-profit, I held an informational meeting with the executive director and her direct staff to uncover what they hoped to have as outcomes for the community-building events. I then planned the sessions. I offered these sessions for the first three days of their first week of work, for a total of three sessions. This was when the majority of training was scheduled for both the new and existing employees. In these sessions, I focused on teaching the employees to create connections and community by using techniques that build trust within the group, and within themselves. These techniques were used to encourage the employees to become fully supportive members of the community. The community engagements focused on exploring the feelings they were having as they learned new skills. The community group participated in movement that was intended to help them work through any feelings they might

have felt in their bodies during training. Each day, I checked in with the executive director and her staff for feedback and made adjustments as needed within these community engagements.

I started each session with an opening of balloon breaths that helped to center the clients. I focused on the idea of change. I led the clients to explore how change felt in their bodies. I played four different songs that were very different in beat, timing, emotion, and overall effect. The first song was classical music, then a heavy metal song, a pop song, and lastly a soul song. I invited the employees to move if they were comfortable and stated that it was okay to sit or be still if that was what felt right at the moment for them. I used verbal prompting such as, "Notice what the change in music feels like in your body." "Do you notice your movements speeding up? Slowing down? Staying the same?" For the closure, I invited the clients to share how the experiential was for them, or if it brought up any feelings for them. I connected the theme of change that they experienced in the session work to the work that they did that day on the farm.

I kept a journal of my work, progress, and feelings during this project. I tracked areas of excitement and of reluctance within the engagements which reflected both my personal feelings and my perception of the participants' feelings. I also tracked changes within the group that I noticed between each of the days. I made notes in the journal of my personal observations after each session and tracked feedback from the executive director after each meeting with her. I tracked feedback that was given by staff or employees relating to the engagement including likes, dislikes, and areas of change within the group. After I completed all of the engagements, I had a follow-up meeting with the executive director and her staff to see what differences they noticed between this group of employees and their ability to self-regulate compared to previous employee groups who did not have this engagement.

I took the information that I gathered from the sessions in my journal and organized it into a chart. This allowed me to group similar findings together and to identify trends. I organized the chart by the day with a column slot for work, progress, personal feelings, and my perception of participant feelings. I also created a chart to track feedback from the executive director and her staff. My final chart gathered feedback from the executive director on her perception of the effectiveness of the program.

Results

The dance and movement workshops were held in the morning for three consecutive mornings at the start of the training day for the employees. In these workshops there were nine total participants on each of the days, of which six were employees, two were staff members and one was the executive director. The workshops were held in the morning, before their work training, to provide them with skills that they could use to help navigate any emotions that might arise while they were learning new work skills later that day. Each dance and movement workshop was planned to last 30 minutes.

After each dance/movement session, I tracked my observations in my journal for a half-hour and then met with the executive director for 10 minutes to gather her observations and feedback for any changes to the workshops that she would like to see.

Day One Results

Prior to starting the workshop, I felt nervous and excited to begin the activity. To help regulate myself, I took several deep breaths to center myself and to calm my body. The executive director introduced me to the group and explained why we are doing these activities and what she hoped the outcomes of the activities would be. Each workshop started with an opening of balloon breaths that was scheduled to last five minutes. On day one, during the

balloon breaths, all nine participants engaged in the activity. Overall it appeared that all the participants enjoyed this activity as everyone was smiling. I observed the tension in their bodies relaxing as they continued with the balloon breaths and also noticed that my body was becoming calmer with each breath.

The employees seemed to adjust to the activity more quickly than the staff and executive director. The employees just followed the prompts of my voice even if they weren't looking directly at me. The staff and executive director seemed more unsure of themselves and I noticed them making eye contact with one another, which I interpreted as them checking in with one another that they were doing the activity correctly.

Next, in the workshop, I led the clients to explore how change felt in their bodies by playing four different songs that were very different in beat, timing, emotion, and overall effect. This part of the workshop was scheduled to last eight minutes. I allowed each song to play for two minutes before changing to the next one. Before the music started I invited the employees to move if they were comfortable and stated that it was okay to sit or be still if that was what felt right at the moment for them. The first song was classical music. I noticed that the staff members seemed to be a little nervous with the change in the activity. They kept looking at the executive director. I interpreted this as nervousness, and I made an assumption that they were checking the body language of the executive director to see what was expected of them. The executive director appeared to be very engaged in the activity, which she demonstrated by spinning to the music, which seemed to relax the staff and employees. Three of the participants just swayed back and forth, four swayed but also moved their arms, and one stood still with arms crossed and expressed dislike for the music which made the group laugh. I acknowledged the non-dancing participant's feelings/opinion and asked the participant how the music felt in

their body and encouraged them to explore these feelings through movement. The participant stood still for a couple of seconds and then started shaking their head side to side while making faces that I interpreted as dislike of the music.

The next song was a heavy metal song. Without being prompted, five participants began jumping up and down and shaking their head up and down to the beat. One participant started playing air guitar and three just shook their head and hips. I noticed that everyone was smiling and the movement by all participants got more exaggerated as the song went on. I noticed that I started to feel more confident in myself during this song because I perceived that everyone was having fun. I used verbal promptings, "Notice what the change in music feels like in your body."

The third song was a pop song. Four participants shook their hips and waved their hands over their heads. Three of the participants moved their feet in a stomping-like motion, one clapped but the other two did not. Two participants were jumping to the beat of the music. I used the verbal prompts of "Do you notice your movements speeding up? Slowing down? Staying the same?"

The fourth song was a soul song. All nine participants slowed their movements way down. All of them were swaying back and forth. Three participants had their eyes closed, two were looking at the ceiling and four were looking down. I used the verbal prompt "Notice how this song feels in your body."

After the song was completed, I transitioned to the closing of the workshop by having all the participants sit in a circle alongside myself. I invited the participants to share how the experiential was for them, or if it brought up any feelings for them. The participants appeared to be hesitant at first to answer. I noticed in myself that I started to feel unsure of how to get them

to engage in conversation with me and worried that I was failing. Silence went on for 30 seconds until one of the participants spoke up and stated that they had fun, and it was hard to switch from one song to another at first, but that it felt easier for them after each change. Many of the participants verbally agreed or shook their heads yes when the participant was talking. I felt a sense of relief when that participant spoke up. I then connected the theme of change that they experienced in the dance/movement workshop to the work that they did later that day on the farm.

In my meeting with the executive director, I asked for feedback on the activity. She liked that the participants appeared to be very calm after the activity and felt like it helped them to become closer as a group. She did not have any changes for me for the next day's activities.

Day Two Results

On day two during the balloon breaths, all nine participants engaged in the activity. It appeared that most participants found it humorous by the way they were smiling and laughing when they deflated their imaginary balloons. I noticed that the staff and the executive director seemed much more relaxed during the balloon breaths than they had the day before. I observed them joining in with the employee's laughter and feeling more confident in the activity.

I then repeated the activity of playing four different songs from the same genres as on day one. All nine participants engaged in movement more quickly than day one. I interpreted this as the participants becoming more comfortable with the activity because they knew what to expect this time. Most participants engaged in similar movements as the previous day with one exception. The participant that stated that they hated classical music the day before, participated in a swaying movement right away when the classical music was played. I noticed a feeling of

excitement in myself and a feeling of accomplishment when the participant engaged in the activity right away.

When the music stopped, and I transitioned the group to the same closure as the previous day one of the participants said, “It’s over already?” I responded by stating, “Let’s sit in a circle and explore these feelings you are having about the activity being over.” I then invited the participant to explore the feelings in their body that made them make that statement. The participant said that their body felt happy while dancing to music but sad when the music ended. Once that participant shared their experience, there was a lot more discussion by the participants on how they felt about the activity ending. Overall, I noticed there was a lot more participation in the discussion and fewer verbal prompts were needed by me. I felt proud of myself for creating what I perceived as a safe place for the participants to share their emotions.

In my meeting with the executive director, following the activity, I again asked her for feedback. She said that the training that followed the dance and movement workshop yesterday went well, and she felt like frustration was lower than it had been in previous training classes. She did not have any changes for me for the next day’s activities.

Day Three Results

On day three during the balloon breaths, all nine participants engaged in the activity. Eight of the nine participants appeared to enjoy the activity by the way they were either smiling or laughing. One of the participants, who was an employee, was not smiling or laughing and appeared to look sad by the way they were frowning. I noticed that I felt insecure when I saw the participant frowning because the first two days this part of the activity ran smoothly and was fun from my point of view. My first instinct was to try to make the participant have fun by being silly with them, but I thought about how that would just make me more comfortable and

wouldn't actually be for the participants benefit. In the moment I ended up verbally stating to the group, "I am so glad you all are here today and are carrying any emotions that you have with you. No matter what emotion you are feeling right now, that emotion is okay and normal."

As I did on the previous two days, I repeated the activity of playing four different songs from the same genres. This time participants were looking forward to the change of the songs and during the classical song one participant expressed their excitement about the music. I used the verbal prompt, "How does your body feel when you are looking forward to a change?" After the change to the third song, I gave the prompt, "Does it feel easier or harder today to change to a new song than it did before?" I noticed that participants were more exaggerated in their movements during day three compared to the previous two days. I interpreted this to be a result of having grown closer as a group during these workshops and felt more comfortable moving in front of one another.

When we transitioned to the discussion portion of the workshop, I told the participants that this was our last workshop together as we had talked about the first day. I noticed that I felt a little bit of sadness thinking about how I wouldn't be able to see or work with this group again. I reflected back to them some of the statements that they had made the previous two days around the theme of change. One participant said that they liked change when it was to a song that they liked but it was harder when they didn't like the song. I verbally prompted the group to explore more about changes that feel good in the body and changes that don't feel good in the body as they are training for their jobs. After the discussion, one participant gave me a hug and said that they would miss me. My first internal reaction was surprise when the participant hugged me but then I started to feel pride in myself and an overall feeling of validation for all of the hard work that I put in when creating this dance and movement workshop.

In my meeting with the executive director, she said that she noticed a staff member using balloon breaths with an employee during training the previous day. The staff member said that the employee was sighing loudly and had a concave body posture. The staff member asked the employee to do a couple of balloon breaths with them and then they asked the employee about the sighing. The executive director said that the staff member was glad to have a tool to work with to get both of them calm before that conversation.

After all of the dance/movement workshop sessions were completed, I went back to my journal to review the information that I had tracked and to capture any feelings that arose in me from the entirety of the experience. One feeling that I was surprised came up repeatedly within this workshop format was the feeling of pride in my chosen profession. I was very nervous about being able to put my best foot forward. I felt proud that I was able to demonstrate the value of dance and movement in a professional setting.

Discussion

The dance and movement workshop I offered showcased the importance of providing alternative methods to help train people with intellectual disabilities for roles within the community. Additionally, it provided the executive director and staff new tools to use when working with the employees who have an intellectual disability to navigate life at work. I used dance movement therapy-inspired exercises to help individuals with intellectual disabilities acclimate to a new working environment and learn new job skills. The DMT therapy-inspired sessions were part of the training curriculum for their new role at an apple orchard and were intended to help the employees self-regulate when they were feeling anxious or frustrated while working at their new job. These same self-regulation tools were taught to the executive director and staff so that they would be better able to support the employees both socially and

emotionally. Throughout the dance and movement workshops, participants reported that they were able to connect with the theme of change through their body and were able to use that experience to help navigate training for their new job and all the changes that came with it.

The literature review pointed to the psycho-social benefits of dance and movement therapy. According to Hens and Dunphy (2020), DMT is a therapeutic medium that focuses on the body/movement and allows accessibility to the ID population to explore their identity development with movement. Movement when paired with learning increases the retention of the information while increasing confidence and reducing anxiety (Crisan, 2021). Both Hens and Dunphy (2020) and Surujlal (2013) found that when dance is used as an element of a learning activity, it helps people to learn new skills and improves the learning experience for individuals with intellectual disabilities. According to Barnet-Lopez et al. (2016), changes in the well-being of adults with intellectual disabilities after a DMT program can be observed, including social skills, self-esteem, communication skills, learning and discipline (Crisan, 2021). Amanda Gordon's (2014) research pointed to the importance of the role of therapist in that the way a therapist understands and communicates with the client impacts how the client feels about themselves. The findings of my project are in alignment with the information I found in my literature review.

The findings of this project helps inform and inspire my future practice, as often people are dismissive of the arts as a therapeutic practice and having an example of practical and effective results within the community will help build connections and opportunities for me and others to help this population. The findings of this project also demonstrate how it contributes to the clinical practice of expressive therapies such as DMT and how it can be used in a practical and simple way. These findings could inspire other employers of individuals with intellectual

disabilities to offer dance and movement to those employees as a way to help integrate that population into the workforce. Future work in the DMT field could focus on adults with intellectual disabilities using DMT as a learning tool, as much of the literature focuses on children and adolescents, but further research into the best way to support adults is lacking.

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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Type of Project: Thesis

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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Angelle Cook

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