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Dynamic Equilibrium: The Potency of Movement and Creativity

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Introduction. Our strongest memories are embodied, engaging all of our senses in movement.

Movement is fundamental to our sense of self and to our embodied existence. After decades of research, it is evident that the brain is organized via information arising from the body. Information from the environment travels through the embodied senses to the mind, and the mind/brain sends energy to the body and engages with the world through movement. This talk explores how vitality and equilibrium can be ignited and supported through engaging creativity and the body in movement.

The body is always perceived in the present. To invite the mind to engage with awareness in the body while moving is potent. Forms of embodied practice have been valued and developed over centuries. Meditation, tai chi, and qi gong inspired more recent somatic and dance practices such as Feldenkrais, Body/Mind Centering, and creative improvisation. All these roots contribute to the field of Dance/movement therapy, which centers movement and creativity in the therapeutic process.

I. Movement and Development

When we are young, we form the scaffold for neurological processing that occurs beneath the surface of consciousness. The cumulative experiences that occur before the age of five create an implicit foundation. Infants learn about the world through the body. Embodied relationship, being held emotionally and physically, influences the ability to trust and connect, give and receive. When it is safe enough, we develop the confidence and capacity to engage fully in life, and move into the world with freedom and agency.

Early engagement is crucial as a child forms implicit internal maps for understanding and responding to the environment. Children who are unsafe, emotionally and/or physically, form more rigid and less flexible neurological foundations. Over time, challenges may manifest as overwhelming and ongoing anxiety, difficulty in regulating emotions,

impulsivity, dissociation, and cognitive challenges. This can create difficulties in all aspects of life. Movement and creative play facilitate physical, emotional and cognitive growth and resilience.

II. Movement and Emotion

Emotions are informed by neurological processes, and operate implicitly, beneath the level of consciousness. What the mind experiences as emotion includes its interpretation of somatic cues from the body. Each feeling state lives differently in the body. Grief and sadness stir deeply in our bodies when we experience a significant loss. The heat of anger is triggered when our boundaries are threatened or violated, and we can feel the energy of emotion at the body level. Fear and anxiety draw us inward. When the environment feels emotionally unsafe, expectations of disappointment and danger can lead to the development of paradoxical defensive strategies which recreate painful dynamics unconsciously. These patterns may manifest as rigidity or chaos, each restricting the ability to engage in robust relationship with the world.

Emotions help us to sense what is important to us, what we value, who we want to move closer to, and when we need to set boundaries. Knowing what we are feeling is essential to making sense of the world. We move differently when we feel safe and supported than when we feel unwelcomed and excluded. Engagement and exploration of the world around us is motivated by curiosity, interest and joy. Dance/movement therapy supports emotional awareness by facilitating somatic and implicit processes that impact mental function. Participants learn to engage and make sense of internal emotional experiences and share experiences with others in meaningful ways.

III. Movement and Perception

Movement as a therapeutic approach is powerful, and there is a reason why it has taken so long to understand it. We have been working from a perceptual illusion, a fallacy that the body is separate from the mind. This illusion is possible because of the brain's complexity. It is through evolution that the brain became specialized and abstract thinking and implicit processing became separated. The significance of the body and its role at the core of human experience is now coming to light.

Conscious awareness through embodied orientation is fundamental to a subjective sense of self. Mary Whitehouse developed a dance/movement therapy approach called Authentic Movement which begins with bringing ones' awareness inside the body in the present moment. The practice allows the mover to be receptive to unconscious emergent symbolic content in movement ...and to find a deep subjective connection to themselves. (Mary Whitehouse). Authentic Movement offers a way to replenish emotional and physical depletion and restore equilibrium. It frees up new dimensions of experiencing and being in the world. Embodied joy, re-discovered in Authentic Movement, can touch a sense of something deep within – a feeling which has moved inside us from the very beginning.

Conclusion

Dance /movement therapy engages movement and creativity, and positively impacts physiology, emotional resilience and cognitive functioning through chosen engagement and active awareness. Interventions support neurological integration across multiple

channels by engaging both implicit (sensory, emotional) and conscious neocortical processes. Dance/movement therapy offers versatile application for a wide range of populations across the developmental spectrum. Effective programs for people with mood disorders, schizophrenia, autism, chronic illness, brain trauma, and developmental challenges are ongoing in many countries. Inspiring work includes implementation with social systems challenged by conflict, with refugees, child soldiers, and trauma. Dance/movement therapy approaches can facilitate both personal and collective healing through building experiences of connection and communication across differences.

Literature Recommendations

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