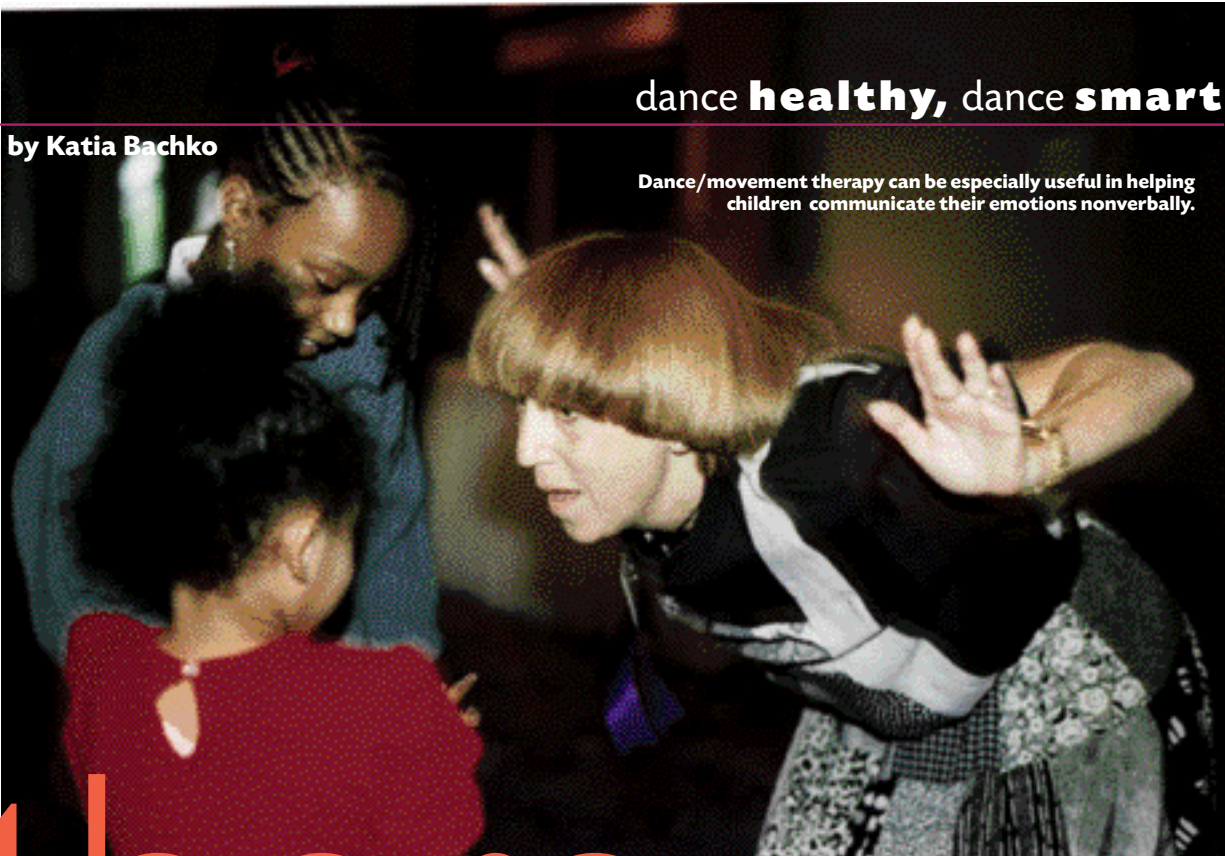


dance **healthy**, dance **smart**

by **Katia Bachko**

Dance/movement therapy can be especially useful in helping children communicate their emotions nonverbally.



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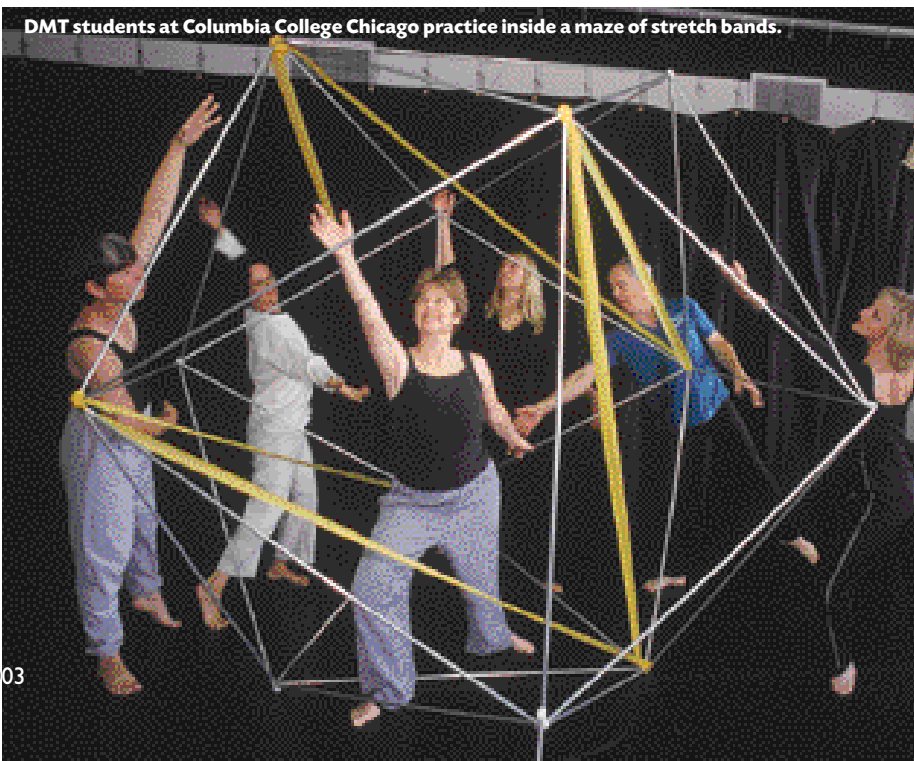
thera-dance

Every dancer and teacher has experienced it. You drag yourself to class, feeling out-of-sorts, and somewhere between the warm-up and the jumping combination, all your worries seem to disappear. Former dancers and dance teachers took note and brought together psychology and the healing power of dance to develop dance/movement therapy (DMT). One-time dancers Mary Whitehouse and Marion Chase were two of the early pioneers of DMT, and now their work is carried on by therapists all over the world.

Even though it is not a widely known area of study, DMT can be an instant fit for dancers and dance teachers looking to evolve professionally. "So often we hear prospective students say that their two loves were psychology and dance," says Susan Loman, director of the masters program at Antioch New England Graduate School in Keene, New Hampshire. "They never knew dance therapy existed, and as soon as they hear about it they say, 'This is what I want to do!'"

Dance teachers in particular can draw upon their own experiences and knowledge of the power of movement in helping others

How can your skills as a dance teacher help you make an exciting transition to dance/movement therapy?



DMT students at Columbia College Chicago practice inside a maze of stretch bands.

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to heal. "I knew dance was psychologically oriented, because it had made a difference in my development as an individual," says Sally Totenbier, administrator, co-coordinator and lead instructor at Beyond Words, a dance/movement therapy training program in Austin, Texas. Her instant connection with DMT echoes the sentiments of many dancers and dance teachers who discover DMT. "In my first semester I found out that there was a field called dance/movement therapy, and I knew that was right for me," Totenbier recalls of her college years.

What Exactly Is DMT?

Dance/movement therapy is a holistic psychotherapeutic treatment that emphasizes the expressive power of the body in motion. Therapists work with groups of clients or one-on-one in a variety of treatment settings such as private practices, hospitals or outpatient facilities.

DMT can be especially helpful for people whose verbal skills are impaired due to physical or psychological conditions, such as Alzheimer's. It can also help healthy individuals establish a mind-body connection and gain personal insight through movement. Another popular use of DMT is in child therapy, because it allows children to communicate their emotions without relying on an adult vocabulary. On the opposite side of the spectrum, therapists can help clients whose sophisticated vocabulary is an obstacle to therapy. "[Some] people use language as a defense against accessing parts of themselves that may be vulnerable," explains Susan Imus, chair of the DMT department at Columbia College Chicago.

One of DMT's effective tools is Authentic Movement, an exercise technique in which clients close their eyes and move spontaneously without music, encouraging them to tap into their unconscious impulses and act them out. Authentic Movement is generally used with higher functioning clients who are looking to understand their patterns of movement or gain a deeper knowledge of themselves. The therapist's observation skills



DMT students at Antioch use scarves in a movement exercise.

are important because he or she acts as a witness to the movement, observing the client and discussing the movements, either simultaneously or following the exercise. Sometimes movements become metaphors. "You might get an insight while you're moving," Loman says. "You might say, 'This reminds me of my mother and the burden of her telling me what to do, so I'm going throw that burden off my back.' And you might go into a throwing movement."

In group sessions, therapists may use Chasing techniques, named after one of the founders of DMT, as another guided movement exercise. Here, the therapist leads the group through a series of simple movements that are both self-contained (swaying or clapping) or interactive (turning to smile at someone or waving at someone). Unlike formal dance forms, such as ballet, there is no specific set of movements—they are all improvised. The clients can be standing or sitting, walking around or remaining still—the focus is on moving as a group and promoting a feeling of togetherness, which is strengthened by the therapist's participation in the exercise.

A group exercise with stretch bands



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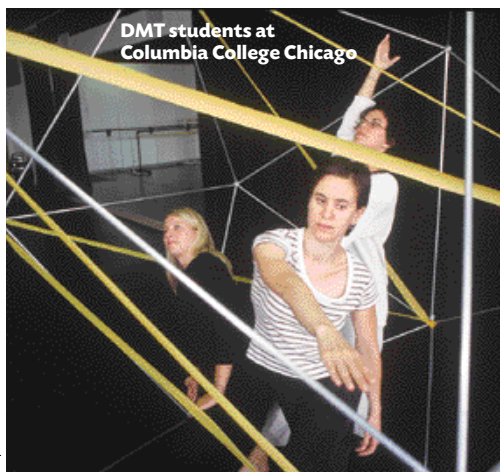
Totenbier cites the value of DMT for people struggling with relationship problems. "We find that we can rationalize through talking and sometimes you don't get to the heart of the issue. Things don't change," says Loman. "But when you move, there's really the possibility of changing."

Moving with a group can help enhance moods and promote psychological health. Totenbier usually warms up with breathing exercises and moves on to rhythmic clapping or swaying. She may then encourage the group to move more vigorously. "I'll say, 'Look at Johnny over there, it looks like he's ready to get out of his chair, why don't we all do that?'" Totenbier explains. "We build into more exciting, more interactive kinds of movement to reinforce the idea that if we engage ourselves, we can end up with a significantly changed mood and improved sense of well-being."

To help clients express themselves non-verbally, therapists also work with music in order to facilitate movement. Therapists working with seniors bring in music from

What Are The Benefits Of DMT?

To help clients find alternate ways to interact with the world, DMT increases their movement repertoire and provides a practice environment. For example, by accentuating the smooth qualities of their gait, clients may learn to walk with more confidence. In experimenting with new ways of moving and thinking, clients may bring these new patterns into their everyday lives.



DMT students at Columbia College Chicago

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their generation to stimulate memory. They also use music to interact with groups of children by establishing rules such as “you put the music on and dance, then you turn the music off and freeze. Music can be a motivator,” says Imus. “It can also be used to support what is going on.” On the other hand, DMTs sometimes avoid music to elicit clients’ internal rhythm. Loman points out that some music can trigger unwanted associations or memories.

Becoming A Dance/Movement Therapist

According to the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA), there are two paths to becoming a dance/movement therapist. The traditional approach is a master’s degree in DMT through an accredited university program, such as those at Antioch or Columbia College Chicago. Applicants must have a strong background in dance and be prepared for a hands-on approach in psychology and DMT. Recreational dancers will find that their creative and improvisational skills are valued more than their technique. “It’s easier if you’ve done choreography or improvisation,” Totenbier explains, “because you’re improvising and you’re choreographing constantly. Yet you’re doing so with the movement that other people have given you.”

After completing the coursework, fieldwork and supervised practice within the degree program, students graduate as Dance Therapists Registered (DTR). This allows them to practice DMT throughout the mental health industry. Completion of 3,640 hours of clinical observation is required for DTRs who want to have a private practice, teach or provide supervision. With these additional hours, therapists earn the title ADTR, or Academy of Dance Therapists Registered.

Dance/movement therapy programs are scattered all over the country, but unlike university master’s programs in psychology, there isn’t one in every town. For those who cannot make the commitment to relocate for a full-time master’s program, some ADTA-approved programs offer the classroom curriculum in a repeating sequence. These alternate-route programs offer flexibility for continuing-education students; after completing the coursework, students can do fieldwork with a supervising ADTR anywhere in the world.

A career in DMT can be a natural transition from teaching or performing. Totenbier thinks of her longtime dance instructor, Betty Jane Ditmar, as equal parts dance teacher and dance/movement therapist. This can hardly come as a surprise when Totenbier describes Ditmar’s teaching approach. As a teacher she is “in tune with students’ relationships and spatial configurations,” Totenbier says. She “pays attention to the individual’s personal development and fosters creativity and helps recognize the emotional component of the movements in choreography and improvisation.”

Even though DMT is a specialized area of the mental health industry, its application can have a positive, real-world effect in almost any setting. “Often DMTs are considered eccentric, exciting, artistic people,” says Totenbier, “But if we can get more people to wiggle a little bit as they go down the hallway, we can even [make] the whole corporate culture more accepting of operating outside the norm.” **DT**

For more information about dance therapy, accredited master’s programs and alternate-route training centers, visit the American Dance Therapy Association website at www.adta.org.