Dance Movement Therapy with Autistic Preschoolers: The Rugrats
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Dance movement therapy (DMT) became popular in the 1960s, and has been making its gradual debut ever since. It was quickly applied to the autistic population with the idea that movement would assist them in making connection within their body and also to the outside world. This thesis focuses on using DMT with children of preschool age who are on the autistic spectrum, using qualitative research methods. A goal of the therapy was to create an entryway for communication and connection within this group of people characterized by similar communication problems. The purpose of this study was to describe the children’s response to the therapy, both within and across the various sessions, as well as to make recommendations for a more large-scale study.

DMT, as such a novel approach to treating children with autism, has a long way to go. Thus far there are no large scale research projects in the field, merely case studies. Over the course of 10 sessions, the observer took detailed notes of the overall classroom setting, and more specifically focused on 4 children in both a morning and afternoon class. These notes were then translated into descriptions and analyses as found in the pages to come.

The methods used were a strictly naturalistic observational approach. It was believed that the children would progress throughout these sessions and display increases in body mind connection, with a newfound form of expression and communication. These expressions were then to be interpreted for further advances within the specific child as well as the field as a whole.

Within each session one could see the children becoming more actively involved, and definitely across the study as a whole, all of them progressed. Attuning” and mirroring”, two different ways of matching and interpreting their movements, were the major tools used when working with the children. Autistic children are very special, and each one unique in his/her disabilities, so to find something which worked well for all of them is impossible. However, with the variety of songs, movements, and activities which take place during the DMT sessions, there was something for everyone. Each person dances to the rhythm of his/her own beat, and these children have found more ways to use theirs to communicate.

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