



The Healing Power of Dancing Together:

A Narrative Study of Dance Movement Therapy Group for People with Dementia

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the practice perspective and transformational effects of dance/ movement therapy groups applied to people with dementia using narrative inquiry. Nine participants diagnosed with dementia with an average age of 71.8 years old participated in the dance/ movement therapy group twice a week. There were 20 sessions with 1.5 hours of therapy in each session. Data were collected from the videos, audio recordings, group records, and field notes, analyzed by “categorical-content” in a narrative analysis method. The results of the study suggest that the dance/movement therapy group has three practical viewpoints: (1) not allowing diagnosis to limit our abilities, (2) awakening body consciousness through the principle of simplicity and repetition, and (3) being aware of the influence by dynamic interaction; and the participants have the transformation process (1) from taking-it-for-granted to discovering the presence and support from the body, (2) from an inflexible posture to the natural flow of movement, and (3) from loneliness to resonance and connection.

This study regards the actual field as the research field. Through the analysis, the study confirmed that this model (dance/ movement therapy) has its initial effect and can be considered as a reference in nonpharmacological prescriptions. In the future, we will conduct experimental research on the benefits of health-related indicators from diagnosis and level classification and renew the effectiveness of this method.

Objective

In 2020, 50 million people worldwide have been diagnosed with dementia and approximately 270,000 of the population with dementia are over 65 years of age, which is a major challenge for social care in the 21st century (Ministry of Interior, 2020; Department of Medical Affairs, Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2017; World Health Organization, 2020). The medical definition of dementia is caused by impaired brain function, which leads to the deterioration and disintegration of cognition, memory, and emotional regulation. It significantly affects the individual's daily life and mental health. At the present, the effect of drug treatment is limited. Therefore, non-pharmacological treatment is an important part of dementia care (Department of Medical Affairs, Ministry of Health and Welfare., 2017).

Dance/ Movement Therapy (DMT) is defined as the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive, and physical integration of the individual, for the purpose of improving health and well-being (American Dance Therapy Association, 2020). Using Laban movement analysis (LMA) as the framework is one of the intervention models in DMT (Karkou & Meekums, 2017). World Health Organization (2019) believes that DMT has positive efforts on both physiological psychological, and social on people with dementia (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). According to research, DMT does have the advantages of expressing emotions, expressing emotions, and interacting with the external world to increase the ability to sense interaction, improve cognition, emotions, and social interaction (American Dance Therapy Association, 2020; Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Ho, Cheung, Chan, Cheung, & La., 2015; Ho et al.2020; Karkou & Meekums, 2017; Stanton, 1991).

This study is based on the theoretical knowledge that comes from the experience of co-construction in the process of practice (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba 2011; McNamee, 2014). The study regarded to use the dementia DMT practice process as the research field to explore both the experiences of practitioners and the participants.

Method

- The narrative inquiry study design. The "categorical-content" analysis method was applied to the data collection process(Figure 1).
- The dementia Dance Movement Therapy Group: creativity and LMA DMT model; To explore the practical process and the process of constructing multiple realities with participants (McNamee, 2014). There were a total of 20 sessions with 1.5 hours in each session and twice a week in this study.
- The study participants: Nine participants of both sexes were recruited from a mixed group of patients diagnosed with dementia presenting a variety of symptoms and representing a range of illness severities and ages. The average age of participants was 71.8 years old.
- Data collection: Data including video footage and session notes.
- Ethics: The study was performed as a collaborative effort with a dementia center at a hospital in Taipei City, Taiwan. Participant recruitment and the conduct of the group sessions were performed in accordance with the principles outlined in the declaration of Helsinki and were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Taipei (No. IRB-2020-045).
- The group leader: the group leader also is this study's researcher, who has MA in dance education and a Ph.D. in counseling and guidance. She had worked full-time as an occupational therapist in the psychiatric hospital in central Taiwan for 14 years; has nearly 20 years of DMT practice and teaching experience. She also has 520 hours of training for the LMA certificate.

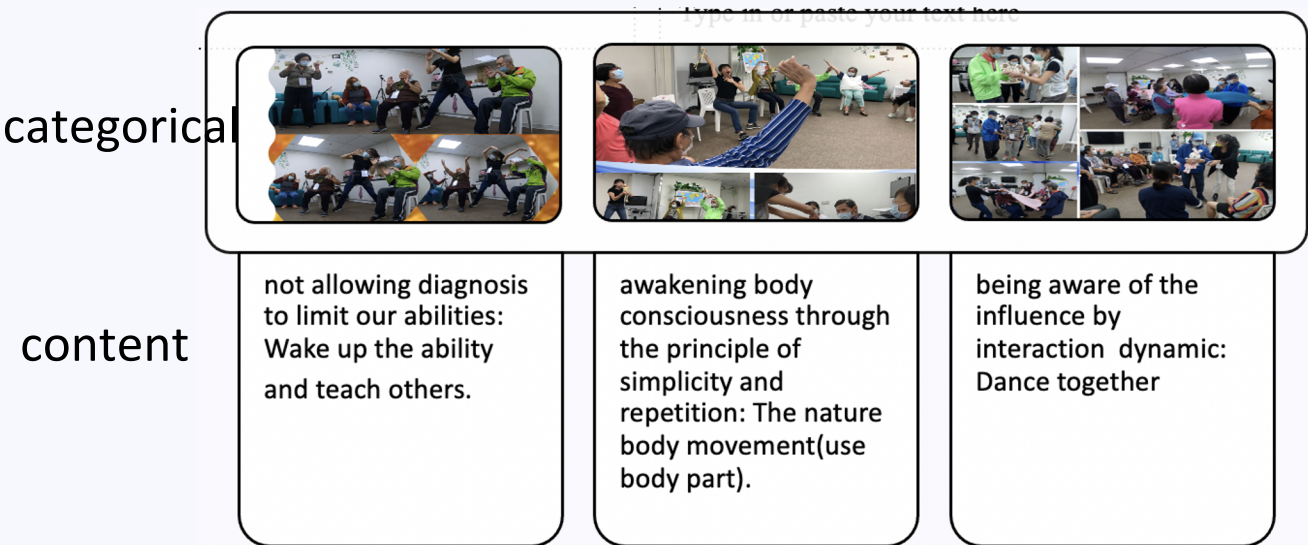


Figure 1 the data analysis process
Note: by author

Results

- In this study, nine participants participated a total of 20 times DMT groups that were conducted under the fixed structure of "Qi-Cheng-Zhuan-He(起-承-轉-合)" which means the process of exploring, enriching, transferring, and integrating. The 81% attendance rate and the active participation of the participants in the group directly indicated the willingness of the participants to attend the group.
- The study suggests two parts of this study results:
- The first part: there are three practical points of view for the practitioner of DMT group for people with dementia:
 - 1) not allowing diagnosis to limit our abilities
 - 2) awakening body consciousness through the principle of simplicity and repetition
 - 3) being aware of the influence by interaction dynamic
 - The second part: the participants have three transformation process from dancing together:
 - 1) from taking it for granted to discovering the presence and support from the body
 - 2) from an inflexible posture to the natural flow of movement
 - 3) from loneliness to resonance and connection

Conclusion

Summarizing the results of this study, we narrate that with each unique individual experience which is beyond the perspective of diagnosis. The DMT group does not focus on the functional decline but on the working function. That is the multiple discourses to meaning-remaking journeys (McNamee, 2014).

Because this study does not manipulate the acceptance criteria and focuses on the process of co-construction, it is difficult to avoid subjectivity for the researcher. But the inner voices of all participants cannot be ignored. It is a practice of turning points. We are all influenced by interaction with others, which we cannot be avoided in the power of the relationship making us relational beings (McNamee & Gergan, 1999). Therefore, this study brings forward two perspectives. 1) Practical collaboration with the mainstream, including: from focusing on "diagnosis" to focusing on "people"; from attention on the “decline” to attention on the "maintain"; and from focusing on the "individual" shifts to focusing on the "relational" existence. 2) The point of treatment is on the transformation process rather than cure.

We conclude that this study regarded the actual field as the research field. Through the analysis, the study confirmed that this DMT model has its initial effect and can be considered as a reference in nonpharmacological prescriptions. In the future, we will conduct experimental research on the benefits of health-related indicators from diagnosis and level classification and renew the effectiveness of this method.

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