

Inclusion of Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) as an Elective Course in Tertiary Education in China

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Abstract

In recent years, China has increasingly emphasized art education, particularly dance, for its therapeutic benefits and cultural significance. Dance Movement Therapy (DMT), which originated in the U.S. in the 1960s, integrates emotional and physical health through dance. This interdisciplinary approach combines art, psychology, and exercise, showing effectiveness in treating psychological disorders and enhancing well-being. Integrating DMT into Chinese higher education could improve mental health outcomes for students by offering an engaging, participatory alternative to traditional counseling methods.

Keywords: ADance Movement Therapy; Mental health; Physical Well being; Mental Treatment;Elective course.

1. Introduction

In recent years, much attention has been given to Art Education in China, especially dance education and performance which resembles China's cultural heritage depicted by Mao Poetry Preface by Han Dynasty which emphasizes the importance of singing and moving of the hand and foot'. One can see the expression of inner emotion and feelings through the dance, which sometimes cannot be expressed through words and other forms of emotions, but offers art form of thought and emotion expression. Evidently, with such potential, dance is therapeutic and has become a therapy not just in China but in many parts of the world.

Literature have shown that Dance therapy evolved in 1960s in the United States, and was initially defined as Dance/Movement Therapy, or DMT by the American Dance Therapy Association aimed to promote patient's emotional and physical integration through the use of dance (body)movements such as dance in psychotherapy (Kiepe M,2012). It offers an expression of

imagery and emotional state of one's physical and psychological condition that could enhance and stimulate one's subjective energy to regulates physical and mental through combination of music and physical exercise.

Such a combination of music and physical exercise has great potential to stimulate people's enthusiasm and offers positive development of body and mind. It is an emerging cross-discipline, covering art, psychology, statistics, big data technology and other disciplines. DMT is not just a stage performance, a field in isolation; Nevertheless, this article is intended to argue that it should be integrated into other disciplines to maximize its benefits and offerings.

China has paid more attention to art education, and had promulgated important documents such as the Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Strengthening the Work of Aesthetic Education in Colleges and Universities in the New Era together with the Guidelines for Public Art Courses in Colleges and Universities. This is a new development happening in the College and Universities.

There is a close connection between art education and mental health education, and both emphasize the coordination and unity of body and mind. Mental health education helps to promote the development of college students' emotional quality and ability, which accommodate the necessary conditions for art education; art education focuses on cultivating people's aesthetic ability, and needs to provide students with a good emotional atmosphere. Therefore, the close integration of mental health education and art education will realize a better results.

The combination of arts education and mental health education may help college students to get out of their psychological difficulties and issues. It is a meaningful attempt and becoming the objective of mental health education. DMT has been used to treat psychological problems and disorders since the 1960s. DMT is a psychotherapeutic method using dance or movement to promote a person's emotional, physical, and cognitive well-being (American Dance Therapy Association,2023). DMT is a dance, whether it is in group or individual performance unit, spontaneous or guided movement, it is a therapeutic method to improve the state of mind and body, so that the participants can achieve self-compatibility with others and with their own internal environment. Compared with conventional psychological counseling, DMT is an innovative expansion of treatment modality, more participatory, interesting and advance. It is an important form of expressive art therapy and is also a creative method to regulate the body functions and psychological state. Dance therapy, as a special treatment modality commonly used in the international clinical and public health fields. It has been proven to be effective and achieve many results especially in gratifying therapeutic effects.

Ancient Chinese books have also documented the effects of dance on the human body and mind. Lu's Spring and Autumn Annals - Ancient Music Chapter has a record that says: "Long depressed into illness, can dance to cure." It can be seen that through dance can cure psychological diseases, catharsis of negative emotions. In addition, Chinese traditional Chinese medicine theory has always been "dance to raise the blood" said that this view comes from the Ming Dynasty scientists, artists Zhu Zaiyu's "music and law book", the book puts forward the "dance and blood, singing to raise the temperament of the idea, emphasizing the dance of fitness and cultivation of the body. The book puts forward the idea of "dance and blood vessels, singing and nurturing

temperament", emphasizes the fitness and body-cultivation function of dance, and argues that the fitness and body-cultivation function of dance based on the close relationship between human meridians and dance. It is also drawing many kinds of dance scores in the hope that they will be accepted and used by society. In recent years, the public has been paying more attention to the quality of spiritual life, and through the research of DMT at home and abroad, the development of dance as a performing art in science and medical treatment has been re-recognized. At present, DMT research in China is still lacking but getting much attention.

Defining Dance Movement Therapy and Its Potential

DMT also refers to dance therapy and dance movement psychotherapy (Meekums et al., 2015). The European Association of Dance Movement Therapy defines DMT as "the promotion of emotional, cognitive, physical, spiritual and social integration of individuals through movement". The body movements of dance are considered key to DMT, which are subjective expressions and communications of emotions. Dance movement therapists analyze the client's body movements and design interventions based on the relevant theoretical and practical experience of DMT: the relationship between mind and body interaction and the relationship between emotions and active movements.

Dance movement therapy can be conducted in one-on-one or group sessions, and the client group is not limited to age and gender. The purpose of DMT intervention is to integrate physical, emotional, cognitive and social interactions into treatment (Stanton-Jones, 1992; Meekums, 2002). DMT focuses on the concrete experience that emerges through dance body movements, facial expressions and interaction with the environment (Koch and Fischman, 2011). In addition, participants can benefit from physical reactions related to movement (Meekums et al., 2015; Karkou et al., 2019). When feelings are expressed in words, the therapeutic effect can also be enhanced (Pylvänäinen, 2018). Zubala (2013) believes that the core of expressive art therapy is to cultivate the ability to communicate with oneself and the outside world, especially for the treatment of depression. In addition, focusing on the perception of one's own body can also develop a person's body image, mind-body coordination and physical expression. This can improve a person's perception of oneself, including the potential discovery of one's own body and psychological exploration. In DMT practice, participants' self-acceptance and tolerance of others in a group therapy environment will be improved. Studies have shown that DMT enhances the acceptance of one's own body and psychology, and is more accepting of others (Pylvänäinen and Lappalainen, 2018). In addition, creative body movements and the embodiment of personal subjective feelings are the core parts of DMT. This includes psychological metaphors that emerge from the client's body language, expressions, or body movements (Ellis, 2001; Meekums, 2002; Meekums et al., 2015; Karkou et al., 2019). Metaphors can provide emotional information about the client, thereby creating new treatment methods to further address psychological problems (Ellis, 2001).

Meta-analyses have shown that DMT interventions are effective in treating a range of diseases and psychosomatic problems, including psychiatric symptoms and obesity (Ritter and Low, 1996; Armeniox, 1998; Koch et al., 2019). In addition, studies have shown that DMT can enhance subjective well-being, alleviate negative emotions, improve quality of life, enhance interpersonal skills, and reduce clinical symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and autism (Fuchs

& Koch, 2014). Although there are few empirical studies on DMT intervention, many existing studies have shown that DMT can be an effective measure for the treatment and intervention of mental illness, and it is also helpful for the patient's rehabilitation process (Jeong et al., 2005; Koch et al., 2007; Röhrich et al., 2013; Punkanen et al., 2014; Pylvänäinen et al., 2015; Karkou et al., 2019). In addition, DMT has a positive effect on the treatment of patients with depression. DMT can promote communication between patients with depression and others and improve patients' mood (Punkanen et al., 2014; Pylvänäinen et al., 2015; Pylvänäinen and Lappalainen, 2018). An empirical study of DMT showed that participants' secure attachment style improved as measured by a relationship questionnaire (Punkanen et al., 2014), and described that after receiving DMT treatment and intervention, they were more adaptable to the environment and accepting of others, willing to actively participate in social activities, became more confident and relaxed, and had more trust in their own bodies (Pylvänäinen and Lappalainen, 2018). Specifically, DMT intervention can have a positive impact on improving self-confidence in patients with depression (Pylvänäinen and Lappalainen, 2018).

Youth Mental Health Problems in China: A Pressing Issue for Attention

Staggering statistics was reported by Blue Book (2022) on Depression in China. It was reported that 30.28% of the total number of Chinese patients with depression are under the age of 18, and 35.32% of the total number of patients with depression are between the ages of 18 and 24.

The country urgently needs to pay attention to the mental health of adolescents. The mental health problems of college students are serious and warrants mitigation.

China currently has about 30 million young people suffering from psychological problems. Around 16%-25.4% of college students have psychological disorders, mainly anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, neurasthenia and other symptoms. About 10% of those who having psychological problems are diagnose to have serious psychological abnormalities. By all those numbers, it is equivalent to 1% of the proportion of college students who have mental health problems and it is increasing (WU Yu,2023). The period of being a college student is an important stage of time for a person's development physically as well as mentally.

Therefore, Chinese College should pay more attention on creating a conducive environment, by taking any measure to avoid psychological disruption that may lead to mental health problems. In consequence, Chinese colleges and universities has decided to make "Mental Health Education for College Students" as a compulsory course, and all of them have psychological counseling centers, which strengthen the mental health education of college students by carrying out psychological assessment, psychological group counseling, and individual seminars.

With the rapid development of China's economy in recent years, high-intensity work has brought pressure on people's lives and emotions. This situation lead to the increase mental health problems in China. In Chinese society, students face unprecedented competitive pressures in pre-adult education such as the college entrance examination. After becoming students at the university, they also face pressures of intense professional learning and employment choices. That is why the issue of college students' mental health has become the focus of education in Chinese colleges and universities. Due to industry requirements, employers have higher

requirements and will hire students who have quality, participation in social work, and have certain skills certificates that may cause a burden to the students. The university stage should be an important preparatory stage for students to build positive psychological and knowledge before entering the workplace. A positive and healthy psychological state during the college time will enhance self-acceptance and social identity, and contribute to the overall development of students.

DMT Integration in Tertiary Education in China and Its Potential

Much of today's curriculum on psychology courses are not sufficient to solve existing issues of the students. There are relatively insufficient professional teachers in colleges and universities to offer mental health classes. The compulsory course like Mental Health Education for College Students have failed to cater students' psychological problems. Classes are taught in a traditional way, and without direct communication and participation from the student. Every student has a different personality, state of mind, and different psychological problems. It is difficult for students to confess or confide their own psychological problems through one way communication teaching courses. The current psychological treatment in colleges and universities are still dominated by this traditional psychological counseling, in which has certain limitations especially for introverted and inarticulate college students (Xie Dan.2013).

There is a pressing need to change the method of teaching for mental health course, as well as to diversify the approach, and improvise the curriculum of the course. We should explore and innovate the new method of learning in order to make it more interesting and shall involve the student's participation by having two-way communication. The aim of having art education in one course is to enhance the level of mental health of the students as well as improving students' physical health.

DMT-related elective courses are seen as a viable alternative, and can be offered to mitigate current issues in China Tertiary Education.

The establishment of the DMT as an elective course, and embedded activities and initiations like clubs, etc., can offer students to further develop ideas and carry out dance activities in structured manner. This will allow students to be more innovative and will allow the students to enjoy themselves. Studies have shown that dance therapy has been applied in student groups, and it has a certain impact on students' emotions, learning ability and motor skills (Karkou V,2006). The study also shown that dance therapy can develop students' self-control, help students develop self-discipline and reduce aggressive behavior (KOSHLAND L.2010). In order to gain a good effect, psychology course needs to be improvised with a combination between mental health education, art education and the right approach of teaching.

In addition, college students in China are today relatively more independent in personality and thinking, more daring to put forward their own feelings and opinions, and they dislike traditional way of teaching. DMT can promote multi-disciplines of learning methods, such as using game activities, multimedia clips, case studies and thematic discussions, etc. Thus, students can experience the beauty of art and at the same time enjoy their body and mind in DMT course. Meanwhile, dance courses allow students to reacquaint themselves with their bodies, learn body language expression, and engage in the rhythm of music. Through the release of emotions,

together with relaxed body movement following the rhythm of the music, the student may obtain a happy experience. Dance can provide the opportunity to make new friends, enhance interpersonal skills and self-confidence, and the relaxed and free learning environment is different from the atmosphere of traditional counseling. Dance will allow people to heal the body and mind in the process of accepting beauty.

DMT offering as Elective Course a Viable Solution

A meta-analysis of DMT demonstrated the effectiveness of DMT for depression, using a pre-and post-test design (Karkou et al., 2019). This study confirmed that DMT has a significant effect in treating depression and met the need for large-scale randomized controlled trials. These trial data provide experience for future DMT in the field of depression treatment and rehabilitation.

Many research in the field of DMT have carried out relevant empirical studies on college students, exploring the influence and effect of dancing group counseling, which focusing on the combination of body, mind and artistic expression, on the mental health of college students. The basis of investigation is to analyze the psychological status of college students. The results show that dance group counseling has a positive effect on the self-concept of college students and effectively reduces social anxiety and social isolation. The study also shown that dance movement group with psychological intervention has a positive effect on college students' "self-concept" and effectively reduces "social anxiety" and "social loneliness", and the effect on the overall feelings of the students is centered on the improvement of the level of mental health and the enhancement of the subjective sense of well-being (Zhang Wen,2007). The DMT elective course may solves the problems of students' difficulty in participating in psychological counseling and the problem of lack of resources for psychological counseling in colleges and universities. DMT also provides an opportunity for students who have their own interest in dance or psychological problems to elect this course at the university.

DMT, as an interdisciplinary development direction and psychotherapeutic practice method, has been promoted by various countries in the post epidemic era, especially in the United States, Germany, Japan and other countries. DMT has shown a rapid development trend, but there are still some shortcomings, such as the lack of quantitative research, etc. Dance is still used as a form of performance in the public's view. Dance now still exists as a form of performance in the public's view, and there is a lack of cross-disciplinary research on the art of dance in psychology, kinesiology, medicine, etc.

There is a great need to explore and research on DMT, especially for the empirical research on DMT and its data analysis, as well as the related ethical requirements, which is subject to breakthroughs in future research. In line with the current policy of Chinese college and universities to emphasize on mental health and art education, there is good time to insert DMT as an elective course. However, a thorough discussion should be made to compile the curriculum for DMT course, to combine the theoretical aspect as well as practical aspect of the course in order to achieve the goal of mental health education in colleges and universities, ie, to enhance the psychological health and the physical health of the students. The learning of DMT shall be customized by inserting Chinese ethic and value. Therefore, Chinese college and universities

may have their own DMT unique course. Additionally, DMT is a great alternative for clients who want to verbalize, experience, and express emotions.

Research on DMT Course Intervention

The subjects of this study were college students from a university in Zhejiang Province, China. Taking two dance elective classes as the research objects, all students are required to participate in the "Art Therapy - Psychological Growth of Dance" course, which lasts for a semester and has a total of 32 class hours. The teacher is the same. One class (30 people in total, including 22 women, average age 18.50 ± 0.73 years old) was selected as the experimental group. The course content is mainly DMT and dance practice, supplemented by DMT and psychology-related theories; the other class (A total of 30 people, including 19 females, average age 18.40 ± 0.62 years old) served as the control group, using the traditional teaching model.

After the four-month "Art Healing-Dancing Psychological Growth" course, after the course, the short version of the "Personality Belief Questionnaire" (α coefficient is 0.96) (Wei, 2010) was used to measure the avoidance of all students. The level of negative beliefs in the three dimensions of paranoia, paranoia and obsessive-compulsiveness, the results are as follows:

The three dimensions of avoidance, paranoid and obsessive-compulsive in PBQ include many common negative beliefs among college students, such as distrust and avoidance of relationships, absolute requirements that lack understanding of the objective laws of the occurrence and development of things, perfectionism, and Overgeneralization, extreme pessimism, and self-centeredness. An independent sample t test was conducted on the negative belief scores of students in the experimental group and the control group in the three dimensions after the course (see figure.1) .The difference between the two groups was significant in avoidant negative beliefs, $t(58) = 3.114, p = 0.003$; and there was a significant difference in paranoid negative beliefs, $t(58) = 2.155, p = 0.035$; The difference between the two groups of compulsive negative beliefs is not very significant, $t(58) = 1.354, p = 0.181$. Overall, the experimental group using DMT course intervention had a certain effect on students' negative belief levels in the three dimensions of avoidance, paranoia and obsessive-compulsiveness.

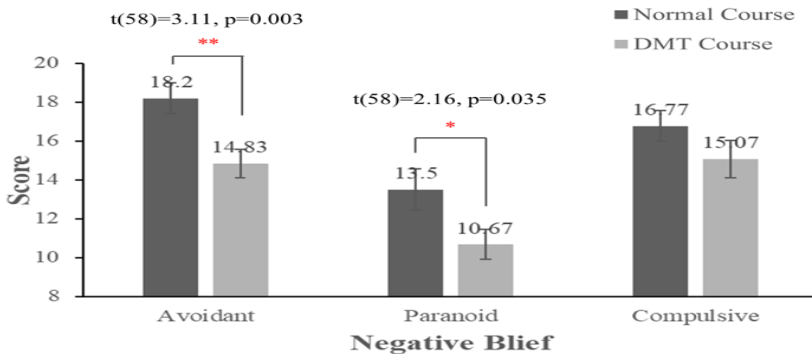


Figure 1 Comparison of differences in negative beliefs of different dimensions between the experimental group and the control group

2. Conclusion

Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) presents a compelling approach to enhancing mental health education in Chinese universities. By combining artistic expression with psychological and physical therapy, DMT offers a holistic method for improving students' emotional and physical well-being. This interdisciplinary approach has been proven effective in treating a range of psychological issues and enhancing participants' quality of life.

Introducing DMT as an elective course in Chinese higher education institutions can address the current deficiencies in mental health education. It offers a dynamic and engaging learning environment that encourages student participation and personal expression. By fostering a deeper connection between body and mind, DMT can help students manage their emotions, improve their social interactions, and achieve a balanced state of well-being. This integration not only supports mental health but also contributes to the overall development of students, aligning with the broader goals of educational and psychological growth.

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