

Using Dance Therapy with High School Students: A Strategy for School Counselors

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High school is a time when many adolescents struggle with social, emotional, and physical issues (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). Ninth through twelfth grades are critical years of any teenager's life, and can also be challenging times for them to openly express their feelings. Research indicates that 12-30% of students in the United States experience at least moderate behavioral, social, or emotional problems (Juvenon, Le, Kaganoff, Augustine, & Louay, 2004). Schools are microcosms of society and are reflective of societal issues. Problems and issues that children and adolescents struggle with often become the school's problems and issues. As such, schools assume responsibility and treatment to help students become more socially and emotionally healthy (Baker & Gerler, 2004). According to the ethical standards of American School Counseling Association (ASCA), professional school counselors are concerned with the total needs of students – educational, academic, career, personal, and social (2010).

Professional school counselors are challenged to meet the needs of all students and need a variety of interventions enabling them to meet those needs (Cormier & Hackney, 1999). The use of creative strategies such as play, art, and music enhance the counseling relationship by offering students various methods of communication (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012). Dance and movement therapy allows adolescents to express themselves in a behavioral form that is acceptable and active. It is often easier for adolescents to express themselves physically than verbally, especially when communicating conflict and/or emotional turmoil (Gladding, 2006).

Abstract

Professional school counselors are challenged to meet the needs of all students and need a variety of interventions enabling them to meet those needs. High school is a time when many adolescents struggle with social, emotional, and physical issues (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). Ninth through twelfth grades are critical years of any teenager's life, and can also be challenging times for them to openly express their feelings. Dance and movement therapy allows adolescents to express themselves in a behavioral form that is acceptable and active. It is often easier for adolescents to express themselves physically than verbally, especially when communicating conflict and/or emotional turmoil (Gladding, 2006).

Dance/Movement Therapy

Dance therapy, sometimes referred to as dance and movement therapy, can be used to connect one's body, mind, and soul together simultaneously. According to the American Dance Therapy Association (2009), "dance/movement therapy is defined as the psychotherapeutic use of movement to further the emotional, cognitive, physical and social integration of the individual." Each movement in some way expresses an emotion that the individual may currently be experiencing, or has experienced in the past.

Dance therapy has been shown to help those suffering from developmental, physical, medical, social, and psychological maladies (Strassel, Cherkin, Steuten, Sherman, & Vrijhoef, 2011). The use of dance therapy has also been effective in reducing test anxiety in college students. (Erwin-Grabner, Goodill, Hill, & Nelda, 1999). Dance has also been shown to decrease depression and increase vitality and positive affect in patients diagnosed with depression (Koch, Molinghaus, & Fuchs, 2007). With dance/movement therapy, individual and/or group sessions are allowed, and the therapist or instructor is only present to observe the session.

Panagiotopoulou (2011) also points out that with dance/movement therapy, one must "take into consideration the participant's dance identity, which is described as the special characteristics of each dance, namely structure and style, steeped in each participant's cultural identity" (p. 94). Through using the dance/movement therapeutic approach, participants are able to become involved more, become empowered (internally and externally), and expand his or her role in life.

Incorporating Dance/Movement Therapy in High School

Dance and movement therapy offers adolescents the opportunity to express themselves in a behavioral form that is acceptable and active. The opportunity to communicate conflict and emotional turmoil physically rather than verbally is beneficial and developmentally appropriate for high school students (Gladding, 2006). Adolescents who are struggling with feelings of anger and confusion can express themselves in a safe and dynamic form that is more often than not accompanied by music.

Physical growth during the high school years is significant. High school students are very conscious of their physical size and are entering into sexual maturity (Rowley & Hart, 1998). Body size and being in shape physically begins to be a concern to high school aged students. Dance and movement therapy helps adolescents explore the radical changes their physical bodies are going through while also exploring feelings of depersonalization that may occur during this growth process (Emanah, 1990).

One way to incorporate Dance and Movement Therapy into a high school setting would be to bring this technique into the school system as an elective course offered to students. Either a drama or performing arts course would allow the school counselor to come into class and conduct small group counseling sessions. These small group sessions would be voluntary and only for those students who are interested. A session may consist of yoga dancing to clear the mind, expressions

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with flags, or even group dancing with a large parachute or other creative objects.

Dance/movement technique could also be used in individual sessions with students. For some students, small groups may limit what the student wishes to openly address with the counselor. Individual sessions are conducted the same as group sessions. An individual session allows the student and school counselor to form a closer therapeutic relationship, which in turn could result in a greater benefit to the student.

School counselors could encourage physical education teachers to incorporate some dance/movement therapy techniques in their physical education classes. Some high schools offer personal wellness classes and dance/movement therapy would fit into such a curriculum. School counselors may have to appeal to administrators for such additions to curriculum.

Because dance/movement therapy has been shown to reduce test anxiety in college students (Erwin, Grabner, Goodill, Hill, & Nelda, 1999), it is possible the same would hold true for high school students. Prior to standardized testing, end of course exams, or other major high school exams, school counselors could teach dance/movement therapy techniques to testing coordinators, administrators, monitors, and teachers who would employ these techniques on the testing dates.

Finally, school counselors could also teach various dance and movement therapy techniques to faculty and administrators. Since dance therapy has been shown to increase vitality (Koch, Molinghaus, & Fuchs, 2007), teachers and administrators who find themselves overwhelmed and tired may benefit from the use of dance therapy techniques. Students would also benefit from faculty and administrators' increased levels of energy.

Limitations

Although using dance and movement therapy in a high school setting has its benefits of allowing students an alternative way of expressing their feelings, there may also be some limitations faced with this technique as well. Unlike other forms of play therapy (sand trays, puppetry, dollhouse, and drawing), dance therapy requires an unoccupied room or a large opened space. This could be an obstacle for the school counselor and students if every room in the current school is occupied. If an administrator does not approve a room for the school counselor, this could possibly be problematic.

Another limitation as it relates to dance therapy could be the struggle with students opening up to this different and possibly unfamiliar style of therapy. Some students may find it a challenge to relate to dance therapy, being that this is a non-traditional therapeutic technique. This technique may be difficult for students to relate to with physical disabilities. Dance and movement therapy requires one to express themselves physically and emotionally through body movement, physical disabilities may hinder a student's performance within the session.

In group sessions, confidentiality may be a problem in dance therapy. Students may begin expressing themselves through dance and verbally explain what certain moves mean to them, or what they may currently or in the past have experienced. Understanding what is discussed or presented in the group could possibly be leaked out of the room may be a limitation. Knowing that information is not confidential within a group could possibly cause students to limit their disclosure in sessions.

Conclusion

Dance and movement therapy can be used in the high school setting to help students become more aware of their physical bodies, express themselves physically, and integrate their emotional selves into their physical selves. Through the use of dance and movement, students are freed to talk about their situations and to become actively involved in the therapeutic process. In addition, dance and movement may be paired with other creative arts such as drama, drawing, and music to promote positive and healthy growth and change for adolescents.



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Advocating for the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Act: The Role of Professional Counselors

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Introduction

“There is a lot that happens around the world we cannot control. We cannot stop earthquakes, we cannot prevent droughts, and we cannot prevent all conflict, but when we know where the hungry, the homeless and the sick exist, then we can help”. This quote by Jan Schakowsky (Quin, 2012), the U.S. Representative for Illinois’s 9th congressional district, speaks about an issue that has become prevalent in today’s society. Mrs. Schakowsky is correct; we cannot prevent the natural disasters that affect our country, our cities, and our towns. In those situations we are forced to be reactive and assist when and where disaster strikes. However, in the case of the homeless, hungry, and sick, we, as a civilized society must take great effort to alleviate the suffering. We must all be proactive in our personal and professional lives to bring relief to the situation.

In the education arena, the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Act (MCKV) was developed to eliminate the discrimination of homeless students by protecting their rights and ensuring they receive the same quality education as all other students.

The definition of “homeless student” has garnered much debate through the years. Is the student homeless if they appear well dressed and attends school on a regular basis? What about if the student chose to leave home or was “kicked out”? Is the student homeless if they live with another family? A variety of factors must be considered when identifying homeless students and providing appropriate services. Data

Abstract

Homeless youth in the United States is rapidly increasing with more children living in unstable or temporary environments. They may encounter difficulties meeting enrollment requirements, have poor attendance, low academic performance, and experience behavioral and emotional issues. The reauthorization of McKinney-Vento Act (MCKV) in 2002 was created to overcome these obstacles. However, many school districts are not implementing these regulations and very little research exists on the effectiveness of MCKV, which this paper will explore.