



Dance Therapy in Canada

Janet Lemon

The history of Dance Movement Therapy in Canada is complex and I only know a small piece of it. If someone was writing this who lived in Vancouver or Halifax it could be a different version, so please keep in mind that what I know comes from my experience and who I have been exposed to.

The above paragraph sums up very well the situation in Canada. DMT is still not recognized, organized or any other kind of "ized". There have been times when it has been. There was the Dance Movement Therapy Association of Ontario (DMTAO) for a while, and it ran successfully for a number of years in the 80's. It even brought the ADTA Conference to Toronto in 1988, but eventually the 8 people running it burnt out. Like Australia, and even more so, Canada has a geography problem. We have too much of it and a larger percentage of it is unpopulated. The urban centers are long distances apart and may as well be in different countries as they are each quite distinct from the other. This makes it difficult for the very few DMT's to get together, let alone organize, train ourselves and create jobs.

Canada is more conservative than the United States in many ways. Although we have a broader social network, including free health care, the lack of funding means little experimentation in non-medical directions. Art and Music Therapy have had the most success in making inroads into the medical system. It is therefore difficult for DMT's to create jobs. In the current political climate, our free health care system is in jeopardy, making it near impossible to work through government-run institutions. Private institutions

have to be convinced to spend on something their Board of Directors may never have heard of. Not impossible, people have succeeded. Some work privately. Many do not do classical DMT. We use our skills in a broad range of unique settings.

I myself have a private practice that combines DMT with Movement Education (Alexander, Pilates, Feldenkrais etc...). At first the Pilates brought the clients in the door. Now my reputation means I am actually getting people who want my unique way of working. Am I doing DMT? By the ADTA definition I would say very loosely yes, but some might argue conservatively, absolutely not.

It is difficult to get your DTR as there are no programs of study here and therefore it is the Alternate Route or school in the USA and both are costly, without the chance of a job as there is (relatively) in the USA. Without job placements it is difficult to get your hours towards an ADTR, which would qualify more of us to train our own and even set up a program. So the cycle goes.

A bleak picture I paint indeed. However, recently I stood up at the ADTA Conference and spoke about how, in light of September 11th, Canada and the USA should be working towards more partnership. I asked that this be reflected in the ADTA by creating a Canadian Liaison and volunteered for the position. So far it is not official, but I have sent out a survey to Canadian DMT's asking about the ADTA and what we want from them and what we want from ourselves.

Response has been positive, albeit small in numbers as always. We seem to have enough "anchor" people in strategic geographic locations to get some kind of network started and there is a Quebec Listserve. A University in Montreal is now offering an M.A in Expressive Arts Therapy. In today's age of email and the conference call I have hope that what we were unable to do as the DMTAO ten years ago we can do now- REACH EACH OTHER!! After that – who knows? Conference? Organization? We need to know each other a little better first.

I believe that in a country like ours, and perhaps yours, DMT needs a different definition. One that reflects the unique ways in which we Canadians have had to apply our DMT skills due to our challenging circumstances. It is my hope that when we reach each other that definition will become clear. The future I feel is not bleak, but moves with promise.

And the experience of Janet Lemon, Canadian dance therapist and movement educator:

My current practice, called Movement For Health, is based on an educational-therapeutic model that I developed combining DMT and KMP with Pilates and Alexander Technique, Contact Improv and Modern Dance. Basically it is everything I have ever studied. My approach is to start at the physical and move into the emotional, unless the client specifically comes from the emotional (which is rare, but does happen).

I also teach courses I call Movement In Anatomy to bodyworkers, movement instructors and therapists that again combine the information I have gathered over the years. I run a training program for Pilates Instructors that is about to be trademarked with my Movement For Health name and my unique approach.

It took me a long time to get here. When I graduated I worked in mental health counselling jobs for a couple of years, with little movement opportunity while I co-ran an Artistic Collective that allowed me creative expression. I got burned out and went back to school for degree number three in teaching and then worked in the schools of Toronto for five years while I started and successfully ran a dance company of young women called The Horizontal Dance Company where I got to apply DMT with dance and choreography development. I presented at the last ADTA Conference on that experience.

I finally got out of teaching and the dance company folded as I started my current practice. Although many may not think what I do is DMT; more and more each day I feel it is and I develop it more in that direction. I believe Education is Therapy. I believe anatomical knowledge can lead to awareness and change which leads to...more awareness and change. Simple idea, but it seems to work.

I am happy to field questions or inquiries about my work or the workshops, training etc I offer. I am sure there are others out there combining some of the same things and I think we should support each other. I welcome your feedback.

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