

On the basis of these assumptions, dance therapy has for its basic characteristics the following:

1. It is expressive. Feelings of guilt, over-dependency, and loneliness can be too overwhelming to put into verbal terms but they are expressed in movement.
2. It is developmental, starting at the patient's physical and emotional level and providing experiences that foster growth and extension of self.
3. It is physically integrative. It helps to reestablish patterns of motility, reduce fragmentation, reduce constrictions, and eliminate bizarre gestures. It also serves to enhance the body image and to develop a sense of identity.
4. It is inclusive. It deals with either individuals or groups, with verbal or non-verbal patients. It is applicable to different age groupings and to different diagnostic categories.

Many persons with physical handicap, learning disabilities, emotional disorders and social maladjustment suffer from confusion about body image, body boundaries and identity. Since the earliest communication in one's life takes place in the primitive non-verbal level of body behaviour; nonverbal level of body behaviour, nonverbal approaches have therapeutic value in dealing with the body ego and body image disturbances. Movement says something about an individual -- his state of mood, his flexibility or rigidity -- and in some way movement interaction can enable a person to change or at the least, can permit him to have a new experience or sensation.

Related studies and literature cite many sources that state that movement is closely related to learning, and that dance therapy, due to its individualised approach and developmental nature, contributes to the development of a positive self-concept. A person's self-concept evolves from his body image, from how he views and experiences himself as subject and object and how he uses his body in interpersonal relations. Research has indicated that the child's mental image of his body, how it appears or feels to him, becomes the foundation of the self and the ego. When there is a faulty or not completed image, it has been found that perception and subsequent understanding is distorted. Dance is appropriate to the special child because it meets his many needs -- physiological, intellectual, social and emotional. Since some children remain on the pre-verbal level, nonverbal techniques such as dance therapy, are needed to reach and activate them. It is recognised as one of the best ways to help children learn to communicate. It is used therapeutically to awaken and revitalize the body, reestablish a sense of trust in oneself and group participation, and provide an outlet for discharge of tension and hostility. Personality is developed through the accumulated experiencing of self in an interpersonal environment.

Dance therapy makes its most valuable impact in its ability to integrate stimuli. It provides a sensory-oriented, as well as a motor experience, a combined impact of the two sensations. The first is derived from the auditory stimuli with response to rhythm, the second from the feeling evoked by the freedom of movement with its release of inner tensions. A person who learns and performs dance movements learns the movement through vision, then monitors performance of it through the kinesthetic sense. Children with disabilities can learn most from multisensory learning experiences. In dance, the sensory deprivation which results from disability is compensated for by maximum stimulation of the remaining senses.

On the basis of the discussion on the benefits of dance therapy for children with disabilities, it