

LEE LIMING
PROGRAMME IN
AGEING URBANISM

Dance and
Movement Therapy
for Seniors

Arts and Culture for the
Elderly¹

Penny Kong

Dance as Therapy

Dance movement therapy (DMT) has been used to improve the health and wellbeing of older adults, providing physical and mental benefits, while encouraging social interaction and non-verbal expression. Dancing has been associated with a preventive effect on dementia. Using non-pharmacological approaches in the first-line treatment of dementia patients is increasingly recommended as good clinical practice. Older adults can incorporate dance into their daily regular routine.

In USA, the American Dance Therapy Association publishes a peer-reviewed journal

¹ This is an evolving database. We will be adding more examples and cases over time.

sharing the latest developments and case studies, contributing to a growing body of knowledge on the field.

DMT in Practice

In a survey spanning Germany, Switzerland and Austria, practitioners shared that the methods they frequently used included: guided movements (specific exercises, moving various body parts), games, improvisation and dancing in pairs or in a circle. They suggested features to consider when preparing spaces and props (Box 1) for DMT sessions.

Box 1: Recommendations for Therapy Spaces

The space

- Easily accessible
- Bright, not dazzling light
- Good acoustics
- Strong contrasts to easily distinguish floor colour, furnishings and props
- Sufficient space to accommodate wheelchairs
- Size – closed rooms reduce external distractions, but larger rooms allow weaker patients “the possibility of being an onlooker who can enter cautiously from a certain distance”

The floor

- Firm but not hard

- Non-slippery (but not carpeted) finishing
- Well-insulated (for cooler climates)

Chairs or stools

- Light enough to move easily
- With backrests, some with armrests
- Stable
- Seats should be disinfected

Material

- Washable props
- Balls – not too heavy/light, easy to grasp
- Music/songs – may be from earlier times instead of just contemporary music
- A variety of sensory material varying in size/quality
- Special cushions/rolls for neck and knees
- Sticks
- Wide floor mats

Patient Stability

- Mobility aids and handles should be provided where necessary

Source:

I Bräuninger (2014) Dance movement therapy with the elderly: An international Internet-based survey undertaken with practitioners, *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy* 9(3):138-153.

Dance Programmes for Seniors

Joy in Generation by Arts for the Aging – Washington D.C., USA

Arts for the Aging (AFTA) is a leading arts engagement organisation recognised by the National Endowment for the Arts, USA. It was founded in 1988 by the late scientist, sculptor and arts patron, Lolo Sarnoff, then 72. In 1986, as a sculptor and founding Trustee of a small gallery called Art Barn, Lolo Sarnoff was approached by the National Institutes of Health to teach art to patients suffering from Alzheimer's. Glowing feedback from nurses about behavioural improvements and positive effects on the participants led to the founding of AFTA to continue such work.

The organisation offers more than 600 programmes annually to older people in day care centres, nursing homes, assisted living and community centres. The programmes cover visual, musical, performing, literary, multi-disciplinary and intergenerational arts experiences. They are offered under two categories of different duration and target participants: Joy in Generation and Arts Alive!.

Joy in Generation is conducted as a weekly hour-long arts session in small groups of about 20 people led by a roster of trained artists from

various artistic backgrounds. It is for older adults with health-related challenges. The session focuses on physical and cognitive abilities and provides opportunities for socialisation and cultural exposure within the community. Box 2 lists some of their current programmes on dance and movement. Arts Alive! is designed for participants who are independent and high-functioning. This programme is run in a series and includes pilots to generate skills development.

Box 2: Dance and Movement Programmes by AFTA

Dancing Our Stories

Teaching Artist: Nancy Havlik

“Experience the fundamentals of choreography in this interactive dance workshop for older adults. Starting with a physical warm up to enhance movement, alertness and discovery, participants will explore music, poetry, visual art and photography to awaken memories, connect to our individual movements, and to share story.”

Free to Move

Teaching Artist: Sandra Roachford

“Using free form movement, participants create dances to reflect thought, emotion and memory, and that are enhanced by props that vary in texture, color and shape. The dance-making is a group effort, and there is observation and reflection on

everyone’s creativity. Classical music and Big Band selections promote an atmosphere for reminiscence and ease of movement.”

Healing Movement, Healing Stories
Teaching Artist: Annetta Dexter Sawyer

“An energetic but gentle movement experience to lively music that encompasses health, well-being, and self-expression. Techniques include guided imagery, for better movement and expressiveness.”

Source: Arts for the Aging,
<http://www.aftaarts.org>.

Dances For A Variable Population: Movement Speaks and Dances for Seniors – New York City, USA

Based in New York City, Dances For A Variable Population (DVP) was founded in 2005 as an educational organisation for dance and movement, with a special focus on older adults. Two programmes were developed to provide free dance workshops at senior centres and senior-oriented institutions to older adults of differing abilities: Movement Speaks® and Dances for Seniors (Box 3).

The former is a year-round programme held in libraries and senior centres in low-income

communities while the latter is a seasonal fall programme comprising a performance and interactive workshop for low-income seniors at centres throughout the city. These community-based programmes have reached more than 4000 seniors at over 35 centres since 2008.

Box 3: Dance Programmes by DVP

Movement Speaks®

This programme runs between 10 to 36 weeks with each 75-minute session structured to include:

- warm-up and dance exercises,
- individual and group dance improvisation,
- memorization of basic movement phrases,
- cool-down exercises.

Participants can either sit or stand, and the programme concludes with a public performance of participants’ original works at a venue on the workshop site or in the surrounding community.

Using choreography to teach the participants helps stimulate their minds as they memorize and recall the dance phrases while moving to music. Participants follow

the movements to the best of their ability, standing or sitting when they need to.

Dances for Seniors

This workshop starts with a 30-minute interactive performance by DVP company dancers where artists introduce and explain the work to the audience. After the performance, audience members are taught modern dance through creative movement, improvisation and personal gesture.

By having performers of all age groups, including older adults, audience members may see the dancers as someone they can relate to and be inspired and encouraged to explore their potential. This is particularly helpful for elderly participants who tend to be shy or more hesitant.

Source: Dances For A Variable Population,
<http://www.dvpnyc.org>.

Colatecs: Clubbing for Seniors – South Korea

Thousands of retirees have been taking to Colatecs (special discos for above-60) in South Korea. They originated as dance halls for teenagers in the 1990s, serving non-alcoholic drinks like Coca-cola to their under-aged customers. As teenagers moved to patronize Internet cafes and karaoke clubs, the Colatecs

began to rebrand themselves to attract older adults; 50-year-olds are turned away for being “too young”.

One such venue is Kukilgwan Palace in Seoul. Established in early 2000s, its 70-year-old owner, Lee Kwan Woo, reports figures of 800 customers on weekdays and up to 1500 on weekends. Entrance fees are low at 1000 won (\$1.16), with income generated from food and drinks sold. Keeping in mind the needs of his customers, the club keeps a medicine cabinet stocked for a range of emergencies, and operates in the day from noon to 6pm.

Customers frequent the place to socialize and dance, with some visiting Colatecs daily. Regulars value the opportunity to meet new people and get some exercise as they dance. But, patrons would generally keep their visits a secret from family members because some view Colatecs as unseemly or immoral.

The Colatec trend stands in stark contrast to the earlier presented case studies where dance programmes are structured and prescribed by an institution to seniors in their care. While not technically therapy *per se*, these venues provide older adults with a casual social scene where they can meet others like themselves. The older adults feel happier and more uplifted after visiting the dance halls, choosing independently to visit the clubs and dance the hours away – a behaviour not dissimilar to

what you see in regular clubs on the nightlife scene, save for the demographic. With global statistics trending towards ageing populations, the emergence of such businesses may have only just begun.

Sources:

I Bräuninger (2014) Dance movement therapy with the elderly: An international Internet-based survey undertaken with practitioners, *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy* 9(3):138-153; S Douglas, I James and C Ballard (2004) Non-pharmacological interventions in dementia, *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* 10:171-177; Dance therapy brings joy and wellbeing to older people, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/aug/30/dance-therapy-valuable-aid-for-wellbeing-of-older-people>; J Verghese, R B Lipton, M J Katz, C B Hall, C A Derby, G Kuslansky and H Buschke (2003) Leisure Activities and the Risk of Dementia, *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 348(25):2508-2516; Discos for those above 60 flourishing in South Korea as seniors get 'Monday Afternoon Fever', <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/discos-for-those-above-60-flourishing-in-south-korea-as-seniors-get-monday-afternoon>.