Lesson Plan for a *Ways of Seeing* Dance Therapy Session

**REFLECTION**

The following is a lesson plan for a *Ways of Seeing* session that is best used as an outline rather than as a strict ordering of specific events that must be followed. It was developed for a class of students with autism spectrum disorders and pervasive developmental disorders but can be used with other children as well. All transitions into new activities should be determined by following the cues of the group and the individuals who are participating. Ideally, the duration, sequence, and theme of the activities will be established by the overall flow created by the children’s participation. The activities should be familiar enough to be comfortable but should have enough novelty that participants react with curiosity and spontaneity, and thus new experiences will be encouraged. The key to leading a successful group session is to keep it moving. The therapist (or teacher) must be prepared to respond quickly and change the activity or develop it further depending on both individual and group responses.

The session described next will take approximately 30 minutes. This session demonstrates how one activity can flow into another during a session; however, each activity could be the sole focus of one session, with the other ideas built in over time. Each activity accomplishes several developmentally appropriate individual and group dynamic goals. The sentences in brackets provide examples of such goals.

**PROMPTS**

1. Create a clear, open space before the session, free of objects on the walls or floor to avoid overstimulating the children.

2. Start the session with melodic music. The children can begin to wander around the room, responding in their own ways to the music. Approach the children individually, trying on and describing each child’s sequence of movements. [This action welcomes and acknowledges the children individually before asking them to relate as a group.]

3. Designate a child to lead the group with her movement response to the music,
and encourage the children to follow as a group. If the children are able, form a line or circle in which to share the movements. For example, the child acting as leader, Ariella, begins to roll on the floor. The rest of the children roll in their own areas on the floor in different speeds and in different ways—some log roll, some forward roll, some rock from side to side. The therapist acknowledges each different roll by describing and copying it next to the child. As the rolls are in progress, Jasper begins to jump. The therapist notes this to the group and encourages everyone to try it by saying, “Oh! Look, Jasper is jumping high. Let’s try that now.” [This action creates individual and group awareness.]

4. Evaluate whether the children are responding together as a group at this point or if they are beginning to lose their group focus. Following is an example of an activity for each response:

   If the group feeling is building, sit down and sing a hello song activity. [This song activity will acknowledge each group member, providing emotional and social expressivity for each child while simultaneously deepening group awareness and developing skills in attention, following, and turn taking.] While sitting in a circle, sing and clap out, “Hello to George, George, George, hello to George, and how are you today?” Have the child use his body to demonstrate how he feels. Watch his actions. Any action counts. If he is unable to purposefully create an action, describe what he is doing and have the other children try on that movement. For example, George may be rocking from side to side or shaking his hands. The therapist asks each child to try to guess what feeling he is enacting and then asks George to describe his feeling. Initially, accept any answers that are in response to the questions, even if they are not feeling states. As the sessions develop, however, teach the difference between feelings and other responses (e.g., Suzanne may say, “I feel excited,” describing a feeling state. This response can encourage a group discussion about what kinds of activities create excitement for each child. In contrast, if Suzanne says, “I feel bison,” she is describing an animal rather than a feeling state. In this situation, the therapist can lead a discussion about what aspects of the child’s movements depict this animal, and progress into how the animal might be feeling.).

   If the sense of group is dissipating, and they are beginning to shift into their own private worlds, change the music to a song with a moderately strong beat. [This beat will connect the children back into their own bodies while they relate to something outside of themselves.] Pick one action of a child and ask the others to follow, gathering the children into a group. Transition the movement into a marching step or large stepping action. [Such actions are simple and create full body organization while the rhythmic beat organizes the whole group.] Follow with the hello song as described previ-
5. Play music that fits the feeling tone and energy level of the group (see Chapter 12) during the time devoted to free exploration and solos. Encourage each child to explore the music alone for a little while. Sit the children at one end of the room or in a circle to watch as each child performs a solo. [This free exploration and solo time supports self-expression, attention to self and others, and turn taking.] Describe each child’s actions as the child moves (see Chapter 12 for examples).

6. Establish the theme for the day as described in Chapter 12. (Themes will become easier to do as the sense of group builds over time.)

7. Have each child find a partner to dance with in follower–leader dances. The children can start stationary, or they can move across the room. One child is the leader in one direction, and the other child is the leader on the return. The children can hold hands, follow each other’s pathway, move in front or behind, or travel side by side. Once the children can manipulate an object without getting too absorbed in exploring its properties, provide a prop such as a scarf with which the children can dance. Each child can have his or her own, or two children can each hold onto the ends of one prop. Play the same follow-the-leader dance game. [This activity teaches children to work with a partner and become aware of their body in space in relation to someone else.]

8. Create a whole-group singing movement game, using verbal descriptions and movement cues to help the children try the actions and possibly repeating a sequence for each child (e.g., the “Old King Glory on the Mountain” example described in Chapter 9). The child who happens to be the leader may also change the pathway of the dance by making the circle into a straight line or a zig-zag.

9. Use a tone bar (i.e., a metal tube instrument in which one end is open and there is a small hole located one third of the way from the top) for relaxation and breathing awareness. Softly tap the tone bar to signal breathing in, and then cover the hole on the bar to signal breathing out. Explain and demonstrate to the children how the body expands during the inhale and softens during the exhale. Instruct the children to take smaller, softer, and quieter breaths as the tone diminishes. Approach the children individually, tapping the tone bar in front of them, and slowly trace their bodies with the sound starting at the level of their ears, holding the bar at a comfortable distance from their bodies. Each child can take turns with the tapping instrument.

10. Create a good-bye ritual song for closure that includes each child’s name. It may be slow and soothing and use hand gestures or full body swaying. Wave to the children individually, saying their names and giving them eye contact. Then, have each child wave to another child and give eye contact before ending the session.
WAYS OF SEEING DANCE
ACTIVITIES FOR DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS

Activity One: Responding to Music

Reflection  These activities provide ways for a caregiver to engage with his or her baby from birth to 2 years old through music and dance. Always encourage the caregiver to spend time watching the baby’s reactions to the different musical selections before he or she assists the baby to move. Between birth and 2 years old, children tend to enjoy dancing to music with a strong beat. They will not consistently differentiate their actions to match the changes in the quality of the music. Instead, their actions will reflect their own personal style and energy level. While listening to the same music, one toddler may run across the room and another toddler may gently bounce up and down, bending the knees ever so slightly. Between 2 and 3 years old, most children begin to consistently direct their bodies to explore qualitative changes in the music. Having them start and stop their dance with the music supports their attunement to the music and begins to introduce the concept of a beginning, middle, and ending to their dance phrase. By age 4, they take great pleasure in their abilities to demonstrate increased body control and qualitative movement variation. Between 5 and 7 years old, most children are able to create a short sequence of actions and repeat the sequence consistently with ease.

Materials  Selection of music with varying qualities (e.g., tempo, rhythm, melody, such as the Call of the Wild CD by Wild Asparagus: “Congress Reel/Fisherman’s Island/Return to Milltown” [track 1, fast tempo]; “Sunday River” [track 3, medium tempo]; “When we’re gone, long gone” [track 11, slow tempo])

Prompts

1. Say to the children, “Listen to the music and show me with your body how it makes you feel.” Ask them to respond standing in place or moving across the floor.

2. Ask the children, “Is the music slow, medium, or fast?”

3. As the children begin to move to the music, watch what they do and enthusiastically describe their actions (e.g., “I see Amy is shaking her leg”; “I see John is stamping his foot”; “I see Kathy is galloping fast.”)

4. When the music stops, tell the children to make a pose and hold it (i.e., freeze). Comment on the shapes their bodies make. When the music starts again, begin to dance.

5. When the music gets softer, change your dancing movements; when the music gets louder, change them again.

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6. When the music gets softer, make your dance smaller; when it gets louder, make your dance larger.

7. Ask the caregivers of infants to watch how their babies respond to the variations in the music and to do the following:
   a. Notice how a baby is using his or her body and body parts as the quality of the music changes.
   b. Dance together, following the baby’s lead.
   c. Create a dancing dialogue by adding an action to the baby’s actions, and see if the baby varies his or her movements in response to the caregiver’s movements.

8. Ask the children who are 4 years old or older the following questions:
   a. “The rhythm is the strong beat in the music that makes a pattern. Can we clap out the rhythm together?”
   b. “Who would like to be the leader clapping out the rhythm?”
   c. “Can you feel the rhythm in a different part of your body?” (e.g., “I see Carl tapping the rhythm in his shoulders. Can we all try that?”)
   d. “The melody of the music is the part of the music that flows and moves. Sometimes it tells a story. Can you feel the melody in your body?”
   e. “Who would like to demonstrate their dance to the melody?” (Describe the qualities and body parts the child uses, and then ask each child to lead a dance as the others follow.)

9. Ask the children who are 5–7 years old to make a dance sequence with at least three movements in it. Have each child demonstrate and then teach his or her sequence to the group or to another child.

**Assessment**

1. Does the child create actions that reflect the qualities of the music?
2. Does the child use a variety of body parts to explore the music?
3. How does the child use the space in the room to explore the music?
   a. Does the child change levels of space?
   b. Does the child change directions?
   c. Does the child keep his or her actions close to his or her body?
   d. How does the child move through the whole room?
4. Does the child move to the rhythm? To the melody?
5. Can the child demonstrate and teach his or her actions? Notice how it is done.
6. Can the child follow another child’s actions? Notice how it is done.
7. Notice the child’s degree of coordination and motor planning ability.
Activity Two: Qualities of Movement

Reflection  As with the preceding music activity, these activities provide ways for a caregiver to engage with his or her baby through dance. Many of these actions can be done while the caregiver is holding the baby. The caregiver can embody the actions, enabling the baby to feel them as the caregiver and baby move together. This will provide vestibular and proprioceptive stimulation for the baby while encouraging social engagement. At all times the caregiver must monitor the baby’s full range of responses—expressed verbally and nonverbally—to help modulate the baby’s heightening enjoyment without overstimulating the child.

By age 4, children become deeply invested in developing their own signature dance statements. They embellish each suggestion with personalized actions that they love to demonstrate with their peers. It is between the ages of 4–6 that children’s most creative and fantastical self-expressions emerge in their self-directed dances. Somewhere in the 5–7 age group they become more concerned with skill development and mastery. They begin to care if they are doing a step correctly and begin to think about the actual composition of their whole dance. In order to maintain their own creative expressions while honoring this budding concern for order and mastery, it is important to teach these movement qualities as “elements they can add” to their own dances rather than the qualities that define the success of their dance.

Materials  Selection of music with varying qualities (e.g., the Mango Tango CD by Davidson: “Scallywag’s Tango” [track 1, strong rhythmic beat] and “Susana” [track 13, slow, languid, contemplative]; the Red Rock CD by Canteini: “Waltz in a Blue Moon for Katherine” [track 3, slow, fluid] and “Carribe Groove” [track 15, fast, bouncy])

Prompts
1. Say to the children, “Listen to the music and show me with your body how it makes you feel.” Ask them to respond standing in place or moving across the floor.
2. As the children begin to move to the music, watch what they do and enthusiastically describe their actions (e.g., “Dan’s arms are very fast”; “Leslie’s dance takes her all over the room”; “Tony is moving his fingers slowly as his feet are taking big steps”).
3. Ask the children the following questions:
   a. “Can you make your dance bigger?”
   b. “Can you make your dance take up lots of space?”
   c. “Can you make your dance smaller?”
   d. “Can you make your dance faster?”
Sample Lesson Plan

e. “Can you make your dance slower?”
f. “Can you make your dance movements strong?”
g. “Can you make your dance movements gentle?”
h. “Can you dance as if you are trying to look at only one thing?”
i. “Can you dance as if your body is only going in one clear direction?”
j. “Can you dance as if you are looking everywhere?”
k. “Can you dance as if your body is going everywhere?”
l. “Can you move your body as if it is very tight?”
m. “Can you move your body as if it is very loose?”
n. “Who would like to show their dance to the class?”

4. Ask the caregivers with infants to lead the dance, with each caregiver observing their baby partner’s reactions closely as the caregiver responds to the suggestions just listed. Notice when and how the babies attend to and gaze at their dancing caregivers and when they look away to take a break; notice as well when the babies respond affectionately, vocally, with their whole bodies, or with only parts of their bodies.

5. Ask the children who are 4 years old or older the following questions:
   a. “Can you move one part of your body while you keep the other parts still?”
   b. “Can you switch body parts that are moving and still?”
   c. “If you pretend you have paintbrushes on your feet, can your dance/paint a path in a straight line?”
   d. “If you pretend you have paintbrushes on your feet, can your dance/paint a curvy line path?”
   e. “What other pathways across the floor can your dance make?”
   f. “Can you put paintbrushes on other parts of your body and paint lines in the air as you move?”
   g. “Can you make a dance using at least three different actions that say how you are feeling right now (or when you wake up in the morning or when you are going to school)?”
   h. “When the music stops, can you make a shape?” (Go around the room describing each child’s shape.)
   i. “When the music starts, can you begin your dance in this shape and feel the difference in your body as it changes shapes?”

6. Ask the children who are between 5–7 years old the following questions:
   a. “Can you add the elements of balance and pausing to the actions and rhythmic sequencing of your dance?”
   b. “Can you add a moment of pausing in your dance before you take your next step?”
   c. “Can you repeat it again?”
**Assessment**

1. Does the child create actions that reflect the movement qualities suggested?
2. Does the child use a variety of body parts to explore these qualities?
3. How does the child use the space in the room to explore these qualities?
4. Does the child change his or her levels of space?
5. Does the child change directions?
6. Does the child keep his or her actions close to the body?
7. How does the child move through the whole room?
8. How does the child use the rhythmic, melodic qualities of the music to explore these qualities?
9. Can the child demonstrate and teach his or her actions? Notice how it is done.
10. Can the child follow another child's actions? Notice how it is done.
11. Notice the child's degree of coordination and motor planning ability.