The Evolution of Professional Training in the American Dance Therapy Association

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Since its inception in 1966, the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) has worked to develop standards of professional training. The initiation of a registry procedure was the organization's first attempt to identify and set forth standards for clinical training. This task was often difficult due to three important factors: (1) the lack of in-depth training opportunities during the early years of the association; (2) the desire and motivation of the ADTA to establish a professional identity; and (3) the lack of a clearly defined body of knowledge. The emergence of graduate programs in dance therapy has positively affected the quality of training, lent credibility to the profession, and facilitated the discovery and exploration of a body of knowledge. This paper traces the historical development of dance therapy training in the ADTA.

Professional organizations exert influence over our lives through their interactions with society in both formal and informal groups. Legislative action, social reform, standards of professional training, licensure, and the shaping of one's professional identity are a few examples of how this influence is felt.

Prior to the rise of universities and guilds during the middle ages, the power and status of practitioners were minimal. Rarely were distinct social groups or professional organizations formed as training occurred on an apprenticeship basis. With the emergence of the university, training shifted from an apprenticeship model to academically learned knowledge and specialized training. Professional groups emerged from such formal training programs by providing needed services to society through the application of academically learned theory. These early professions gained both power and status. It was the underlying body of knowledge, an understanding of the systematic theory on which skill and practice is based, which lent credibility to both the profession and the university.

In many ways the dance therapy profession has evolved in a non-traditional fashion. Since its inception in 1966, the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) has established standards of...
professional training, produced a code of ethics, developed guidelines for graduate training, and published a professional journal. Recently the organization has turned its attention to developing jobs and expanding awareness and recognition of dance therapy at both public and governmental levels. As a result of these efforts, dance therapy has been included in federal legislation and regulations (Public Law 94-142 and CETA), the White House Conference on the Arts, and as part of the President’s Commission on Mental Health. Dance therapy is included in the Federal Civil Service’s job classifications. A number of states have already developed state job classifications which include dance therapy. It is interesting to note that as a profession dance therapy is beginning to make a positive impact on society although a specific body of knowledge has not yet been defined and developed. There is very little published material on dance therapy theory. Treatment outcome studies and other areas of dance therapy research are even more scarce. It is this author’s belief that the lack of a clearly defined body of knowledge is directly related to the unusual way in which training has developed within the dance therapy profession.

Throughout its history, the ADTA has addressed itself to the recurring issues of professional training and education. So often significant processes such as this are not documented, but left to the memories of those few people who have been intimately involved in the process. This paper is an attempt to document the evolution of professional training within the ADTA and to provide an understanding of the importance of graduate programs in dance therapy.

**Early Training in Dance Therapy**

Prior to the development of the first professional training program in an academic institution (Hunter College, 1971), most dance therapists received their training through apprenticeships with established dance therapists or by taking nonacademic courses and workshops. Training opportunities were often limited to a short period of time and available in only a few areas of the country. Responding to the requests of aspiring dance therapists in the late 1950’s, Ms. Chace, a pioneer in the field of dance therapy, began to offer an intensive three week training program at the Turtle Bay Music School in New York City. On occasion she allowed selected individuals the opportunity to apprentice with her at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital and Chestnut Lodge in the Washington, D.C. area. A similar situation occurred on the West Coast as dancers began to hear about the unique work of Trudi Schoop and Mary Whitehouse. An