

TIGER DANCE THERAPY

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PURPOSE

We would like to focus the Tiger Dance Therapy to the rest of the world as a powerful tool to develop people with intellectual disabilities. We would like also to patronize the folk art Tiger Dance, disappearing day by day from the present so called civilized scenario. Our aim is above all to deliver a message of hope in the approach of persons with intellectual disabilities.

KEYWORDS

Tiger dance, Tradition, Lebenshilfe Institution

INTRODUCTION

The Tiger Dance Therapy was developed by Saraswathi Devi Tallapragada (“Sarah”) and her educational team at Lebenshilfe. It was specially tailored for people with special needs who have difficulties linked to, among others, sensory disorders, concentration, inability to establish social networking, health, and mental health promotion. The goal of Tiger Dance Therapy is the promotion of proper body-mind coordination and showing solutions to several behaviour disorders stand as its main motto.

The therapeutic application of tiger dance began almost twenty-four years ago. It is creating amazing results in improving the challenging behavior of persons with severe intellectual disabilities (SID). As age makes no bar, this therapy is accessible to all people from severe to mild, basing on their individual needs.

Our national animal tiger is most alluring. His movements are so graceful, “In all of creation there is no wild animal to match the tiger. His sheer beauty, the glorious coloring and stripes can be awe-inspiring.” (E. Ajaikumar Reddy’.). Normally tigers are found in deep forests and zoological parks. Some times they make appearances in circuses too.

Lebenshilfe’s work on behavior self-management, skill training, and specialized education in structured classrooms as well in structured workshops and social activities created an astonishing atmosphere for learning. Tiger Dance is included in Lebenshilfe’s intervention program for persons having SID, regardless of their communication skills.

WHAT IS TIGER DANCE?

The origin of Tiger Dance is an ancient man-evolved creativity. The primitive man who lived in close proximity with wildlife imitated tiger movements amusement. That fun-sake imitation turned slowly into a traditional dance form. It was later transmitted to present generations. *See* The New Indian Express, The Hindu. Tiger

Dance is a very popular and truly enjoyable folk art. It is a source of entertainment, a cause for social unity and a reason for thrill. Performances attract large gatherings. People enjoy seeing tiger dancers, dancing at their door-steps during the festive occasions and present gifts and cash awards. Tiger dance requires no language and goes by a rhythmic drum-beat produced by a “tasa”, an instrument specially made for this purpose. Tiger Dance needs no stage for performance. The primary requisites for performance are yellow paint and black lines all over the body, and a tiger mask. This old-style street dance can be presented on roads or even in the open streets, any time and anywhere. Viewers in huge crowds encircle these street dancers while dancing all in excitement to see the synchronization of foot, shoulder and neck movements. This traditional dance attracts crowds and has the power of attracting audiences. It needs no theatre, no curtains no stage props for presentation. In view of the above features it differs from a few folk and other classical dances of India. Tiger Dance is usually performed in village rituals and festivals. It is greatly fuelled by the folklore of rural communities. Even now it is practiced in the states of West Bengal as “bagh”, Karnataka as’ “huli vesham” and in Andhra Pradesh as “pulivesham.” Across the western coast of Karnataka, people dance in worship of tigers. Hindus and Muslims perform this dance following the ancient traditions during Dusshera, Pongal or Moharrum. It is performed during the festivals of Goddess Durga, local deities like “ Paidi talli, “Jai Bhavani,” “Polamamba,” “Maridimamba” and others “in the spiritual land of Asia they have acquired a religious significance and supernatural potency. In India the tiger is the hollowed steed of the Hindu Goddess Durga and is thought of as a god in its own right.” (Mills, 2004).

USAGE OF Tasa

Tasa is a specially made drum meant for Tiger. It acts as a very good activator and stimulates the ear, facilitating sound reception. The tympanic membrane is the receptive part of the ear which trembles at any acoustic and transfers it to the three small bones in the ear. Through them sound reaches the auditory nerve and from there creates auditory pleasure. In people with mental retardation these pleasant changes could sometimes be interrupted due to various reasons. The Tasa helps boost the brain by producing excellent

drumbeats. While dancing, the foot and its fingers touch the floor, receiving pressure, and transmitting rhythmic information to the brain.

APPLICATION OF YOGA: A SOUND MIND IN A SOUND BODY:

As is the case for yoga, for example, the body and mind are interlinked with the invisible energy, called "prana" which is nothing but energy produced with a power to prolong one's healthy life. The body creates movements or physical expressions as it is commanded to by the mind. Body acts and mind reacts. Body looks at the mind to receive commands and the mind looks at the body for suitable applications. Both depend on each other for the promotion of perfect functioning of all the systems of the body. There should be a balance in the collaborative functioning of the body and mind. Yoga brings such collaboration. This is possible through 'inhale and exhale'. Certain tiger hunt jumps and body movements help to synchronize the acts of inhaling and exhaling thereby leading to perfect health. The ancient Indian concept of yoga destroys stress. Tiger dance carries the same purpose.

Normally the tiger uses its front paws for hunting. Standing on a front leg after jumping, it lifts the back leg and stays in that position as he lifts the right leg. In this process, its neck and shoulder movements are more involved. Tiger has five fingers to each leg but only four fingers touch the ground while jumping forwards for hunting. As such those four fingers receive pressure and get stimulation to the nervous system. People with mental retardation receive similar stimulating experiences using their hands and feet through tiger dance therapy.

THE TIGER DANCE THERAPY METHOD

Tiger Dance is taught in four initial steps

Step I. The first step involves postures like sitting, bending, stretching, as well as moving backwards and forwards. Three yoga postures are involved in this step. Sitting involves

Garuda Asana (sitting), Hala Asana (bending:like a plough), and Mayura Asana (stretching like a peacock).

Step II. The second stop involves neck movements. Hands are kept down while shaking the shoulders.

Step III. The third step involves upward movements while keeping the head up, looking at the sky, raising the hands upwards and moving the shoulders like a peacock.

Step IV: The fourth step consists of rolling movements in a crawling position. (Yoga Mudra and Dhanurasana). An excellent exercise for the upper and lower limbs and to strengthen the spinal cord.

Each participant is allotted 30 minutes (twice a week). A four-week period is provided for each learning step and extended if required.

The therapist should collect the baseline data and information relating the participant's behavior before planning for therapy module. Therapists should be friendly and create a suitable environment for learning. The teaching process requires a fair amount of patience. No force should be applied. Therapists should help the child express their feelings, problems, anger, guilt, hatred and any other emotion,. Tuning positively to the drum-beat.

In public performances and social celebrations a large crowd gathered at Janatha colony during the local deity's, "Jai Bhavani's" celebration to catch a glimpse of the tiger dancers. A group of people came to see the tiger dancers perform. People with mental retardation came outfitted in alluring yellow costumes, painted with black stripes, wearing similar tiger masks. They were flanked by a huge audience. The viewers were excited and truly engrossed in the tiger dance presentation. Every performance, regardless of time or place, is a show-stopper. The performers stay in their audience's hearts, which in turn facilitates their integration into their community.

SOME HYPOTHESIS ON TIGER DANCE THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES

Sensory stimulation

Tiger dancing stimulates the five sensory organs. The Drumbeat promotes hearing skills. The costume colors promote visual perception. Licking the tiger cubs promotes tasking skills. Rubbing the tiger cubs promotes touch.. Smelling the surroundings promotes kinesthetic senses.

a) Visual stimulation. The colorful guise of the tiger, yellow with black stripes is very attractive and promotes visual stimulation. It helps to activate the sensory receptor, the eye, which receives sensory inputs.

b) Auditory stimulation. The drumbeat improves hearing skills and sense of reasoning. Persons with irregular movements, jerky gait, or poor walking balance learn to match their body to the drumbeats, developing coordination between auditory stimulation and movement.

c) Movement stimulation. Encouraging persons with SID to crawl over their knees as initial preparation is essential. Most of the persons with SID enjoy crawling over their knees and tiger dance involves some steps to satisfy their desire.

e) Complex stimulation. Persons participating in Tiger Dance Therapy are encouraged and helped to prepare masks using waste paper material, hand gloves preparation, and sewing of costumes.

Sensory Cognitive Development

The relationship between the body and mind of people with mental retardation, remains a conundrum. Their thoughts cannot be converted into meaningful actions as quickly for other people. This therapy helps the mentally retarded imitate the tiger hunt jumps while concentrating. Tiger hunt jumps that are more similar to yoga postures help physical and emotional expression whereas the drumbeat helps to convey the thoughts leading to sensory cognitive development.

Learning Expression Skills

Tiger dance is a cerebral creative art. It promotes expression skills like anger, aggression, love, affection, happiness, and joy. . Imitating the tiger's pattern of definitive movements acts as an outlet for accumulated aggression, anger, and tension. The tiger cubs are attached to the mother tigers until they learn the technique of hunting. During this period, tiger cubs learn expressions of love, happiness, and joy from the mother tiger through acts of licking, rubbing, and patting. Tiger Dance therapy helps children learn expressions of love, joy, and happiness while imitating the movements of the baby tigers.

Learning from Sounds: Promotion of Communication Skills.

It is interesting to notice that the tigers and tigresses communicate with each other. The tigress communicates with her cubs using a limited vocabulary, "a contented tigress being nuzzled by her cubs will sometimes purr. Cubs, if they are unhappy they miaow. As the cubs grow older and their play becomes increasingly robust they sometimes snarl and whicker at each other." The tigress uses three sharp grunts times to indicate that her cubs must follow her. "The most important is the short, sharp grunt often in threes-ur, ur ,ur-- which seems to be a sign for the cubs to follow her. . . . The friendly sneeze appears to be an affectionate note of greeting which can also be used between adults." Tigers roar to express their desire to mate or just to say "Here I am." See Stephen Mills. People with mental retardation imitate these sounds and thereby acquire better communication skills.

Promotion of Motor Skills

Various postures and vigorous dance movements involved in this dance help to improve fine motor and gross motor skills. It helps to strengthen particularly the muscles of the shoulders and neck, synchronized with complex foot work. Children with mental handicaps imitate tiger cub movements during therapy. They play with each other like tiger cubs following each other, bouncing out on one another, rolling down in locked embraces. They use their four claws for thrashing out. All this leads to motor skills promotion.

CASE REPORT BY MRS DEVI

We underline that this report was approved by the family of Martin.

It all started 24 years ago when a distraught mother brought her fourteen year old son, Martin for admission. He was extremely aggressive with a destructive bent of mind. Pelting stones, pulling hair, hitting, breaking things, destroying plants, tearing clothes, pulling the tails of the cattle, and thereby irritating others became his regular routine. In other words he was impossible and uncontrollable.

Personal history

There were traces of mental retardation in Martin's family. His paternal aunt was a severely retarded person. Martin's mother fell down twice during the conception period. He was born at home assisted by a midwife. Mother had a prolonged labor. Martin was born totally blue and birth cry was absent. He turned into a person with severe mental retardation, as well as epilepsy.

After admission it was fully realized that he was uncontrollable and causing greater disturbance to the institution. He started beating everybody and using abusive language. He was constantly crying and making louder voices. Nobody was willing to keep him in their classroom. Martin's challenging behavior was problematic even for me. Given these circumstances, I decided to keep him under my personal care. I converted my office into his classroom. Martin came to my office every day. I used no force and gave no commands. Despite my sensitive and affectionate handling, there was no improvement. He continued to cry, stand at the window, looking out, and using abusive language. This situation continued for two months. I was at my wit's end.

Initiation of Martin to Tiger Dance

One day, many moon nights later, a sudden change was noticed in Martin. He stopped crying and shouting. He was completely engrossed in a hypnotic drumbeat

which accompanied a group of tiger dancers. The Tiger Dancers were in a procession at a distance. I was totally flabbergasted to find Martin relaxing and loosening his grip on the iron bars of the window.

Immediately I invited the whole group of Tiger Dancers, along with their audience of thirty to forty men, women and children onto the Lebenshilfe premises. I asked them to continue dancing for about five to ten minutes. Martin was greatly excited by the Tiger Dancers' movements. We noticed that the dance caught Martin's attention. He started producing body movements matching to the sounds of the drums. Initially he went to a corner and tried to imitate the tiger hunt jumps. After a little while, he went to the dancing group and tried to touch them to ascertain whether they were real animals. After 6-7 minutes he started dancing with them and enthralled everyone. With this unexpected event there was a dramatic change in Martin's behavior.

The next day, to everybody's surprise, he was seen on the school with no signs of crying. Entering the office without hesitation, he asked for drumbeats. A pre-recorded drum-beat was kept ready to use the as an incentive.

He spent whole day in cheers dancing to the drumbeats. Gradually, Martin was able to concentrate, behave with stability, stop beating, biting, and destroying things. She also started sitting in class along with other children. It was noticed that Tiger Dance worked out wonders on Martin and led to a gradual reduction of unwanted and aberrant behavior. It was quite obvious that rhythmic sounds attracted Martin by the way he turned his head towards the drumbeat and followed the rhythm with his fingers. This therapeutic technique was found to be helpful to convert the aberrant behavioral disorders into acceptable behavioral patterns. It engages the entire body in rhythmic dance movements, giving a head-to-toe experience to the participants through subtle and strong gestures. The experience also motivates the participants and audience and stimulates their senses. In view of the satisfactory results, it was decided to continue this therapy on Martin. Later an educational team was formed for the purpose of exploring possible ways to apply Tiger Dance on other children. The idea of Tiger Dance is to translate irregular body movements of persons with SID into meaningful gestures. Tuning to the tiger hunt jumps with rhythmic drum beats proved to be an effective therapy.

Impact of Tiger Dance on Martin.

About sensory and cognitive skills, relaxation skills were promoted. Martin seemed to learn a better use of cognition from sensory inputs. Martin stopped destructive behavior.

From the social point of view Martin acquired social recognition, acceptance, and appreciation. Martin improved good behavior habits, politeness in social gatherings, friendly relations with neighbors, and became helpful to parents at home. Martin learned to use public transportation independently. Dancing in a group increased his sense of tolerance, unity, and caring for others. Concerning health aspects, Martin's digestive system seemed to be more regulated. Watering the plants at Lebenshilfe and feeding the neighbors' cattle showed his increased sense of responsibility and socially adequate interaction. Tiger masks preparation, and painting the costumes developed logical and meaningful thinking.

From the vocational standpoint, Martin turned into a good carpentry worker.

DISCUSSION

Martin's case report does not purport to be a scientific conclusion. The aim of this paper is simply and modestly to show an approach, needing a relatively low economic investment, and apparently producing a satisfactory result on a severe case of behavioral disorders. We try to discuss the hypothesis described, and the application of this therapy can be assessed from various aspects.

Sensory stimulation. Martin reacted positively to the activation of five sensory organs. He appreciated visual stimulation through the colorful disguise. The drumbeats stimulated hearing. Movement stimulation was linked to the coordination between auditory stimulation and movement. Martin managed a more complex stimulation by helping to prepare masks using waste paper material, painting paper, and drawing shapes.

Sensory Cognitive Development. Martin showed improved concentration and the ability to pay attention. He also developed reasoning skills that he could apply to simple situations.

Learning Expression skills. Martin developed observational skills, expression skills and reasoning skills.

Learning from sounds: Promotion of communication skills. Martin seemed to show a better control of his movements and impulsiveness. He also shows better comprehension of his body.

Motor skills promotion. Martin developed gross and fine motor activity, as evidenced by his acquisition of carpentry skills. Martin had better motor functions and showed an excellent body balance. Martin was a “good dancer,” aptly following the music with this body. He also showed excellent performance in acrobatic dance paths. Martin strengthened both his upper and lower limbs. Even the minute muscles and nerves are strengthened by certain postures like picking up a currency note with the eyelids and lips.

From the social point of view, Tiger Dance, as we said above, creates relationships between people with mental retardation and society. Martin seemed to experience a feeling of belonging to the group of dancers. He also developed better self confidence.

No sophisticated tools are involved. Masks are made out of waste paper material. Costumes are made out of cotton material. The entire dance routine only uses a drumbeat. The costumes, the gloves, and the masks are handmade. All they requires is a small amount of paint, so the cost is very low.

CONCLUSION.

Tiger dance is a less expensive therapeutic innovation that can bring astonishing results. Encouraging the usage of this therapy leads to revival of this dying traditional folk art. The tiger population is depleted and fast disappearing. Protecting tigers has

become a global concern now. The population of people with mental handicaps at Lebenshilfe would like to contribute their efforts to create a sense of awareness through tiger dance. It is their social commitment. We welcome further study to explore suitable applications of this therapeutic approach for persons with SID.

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