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## Equine Therapy From A Dance/Movement Therapy Perspective

Cecilia Clasen

*Sarah Lawrence College*

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Equine Therapy From A Dance/Movement Therapy Perspective

Cecilia Clasen

Submitted in partial completion of the

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May 2017

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I would like to say thank you to my parents for introducing me to animals at such a young age. They are the reasons why I started riding horses and why I continued to be drawn to them over the years. My parents also introduced me to dance, and I thank them for the love I have for the art and the support it has given me through my life so far.

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### Abstract

Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP) is a form of therapy that utilizes a team approach of a psychotherapist, an equine specialist and a horse or horses, all working together to aid individuals in experiencing personal emotional healing and growth. It can be particularly effective when there are barriers to communication. Grooming, leading and riding horses can provide opportunities for self-awareness and attunement to others. This thesis discusses how the discipline of dance/movement therapy may deepen the practice of equine facilitated psychotherapy. Specifically, dance/movement therapists are trained to observe subtle non-verbal movement cues, and to use skills such as mirroring and imagery to help clients expand on their movement repertoire and connect physical experience to emotion and cognition.

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## Horses

Horses are very unique creatures. They have developed over time, adapting to their environments and to human needs. Presently, there are roughly 300 breeds of horses and ponies that all fall under the species *Equus caballus* (Sellnow & Butler, 2012). Other equines, such as zebras and donkeys, fall under their own categories of species. Horses kept as pets live on average about 18 years, but some can live up to 30 years. The height of a horse is measured in “hands”, roughly four inches wide. A horse averages between 11 and 18 hands, with weights ranging between 800 and 1,2000 pounds (Sellnow & Butler, 2012). Despite their size and speed, horses are a prey for other animals. As a result, they live in herds and have developed keen senses, allowing them to respond to each other’s cues about their surroundings. This awareness allows horses to respond or react to other members of the herd when they are tense or alert, when they get spooked, as well as when all members of the herd are calm and relaxed.

## Senses

One of the most crucial senses for a horse is their vision. Horses have the largest eyes in the mammalian species, including whales and elephants (Hill, 2006). They do not have lenses in their eyes, which are shaped in a way that does not give them perspective on objects. A horse’s eyes are on the sides of its head. In order for them to judge where objects are, they have to adjust their heads, and or may need to adjust their body closer to an object to fully see it. Horses have binocular and monocular vision; monocular vision means that each eye has its own field of view (Hill, 2006). A horse can see in front, to the side and behind, depending on the placement of the head. Binocular vision means that

while looking forward, their range of vision is smaller than their 260-degree range of monocular vision. Binocular vision is used when a horse is looking very closely at something in front of his head, while grazing for example. A horse has a roughly five to fifteen degree blind spot (Hill, 2006).

What horses lack in vision, they make up for in other senses, such as hearing. Their ears can individually rotate 108 degrees and also can pick up sounds our human ears can't. A horse may hear a sound and can lift its head without having to turn its whole body (Edwards, 2016). The placement of their ears can also tell a lot about how a horse is feeling in the environment. A horse's ears and their placement relate to its body language. A horse that has his ears facing forward means that he is attentive or curious about something. In another situation, a horse will often turn one ear forward and the other backward to concentrate on a rider or instructor, while still listening to what is out in front of them. A horse that has both ears turned backwards in a relaxed manner indicates that horse feels safe, while a horse that is sleeping may let his ears flop down to his neck (Sellnow & Butler, 2012). One last placement for a horse's ears would be pinned back and folded. This may mean that the horse is annoyed, or, more commonly, angry. Though the ears are small, they play a vital role in communication to others.

Horses can also use touch to communicate how they are feeling with one another. Touch and soothing of others comes naturally for horses, as each horse experiences touch as a form of communication with their mothers. Grooming and nuzzling are ways horses send signals to one another, just as biting and baring their teeth can be a form of communication. Horses often use their mouths, whiskers and their noses to give them

sensory information to investigate objects. They may also use their hoof to inspect things (Hill, 2006).

When humans touch horses, it needs to be done with care. Horses do not like to patted but rather stroked or rubbed. Doing this mimics the relationship building that horses do amongst one another, as they are social animals. Understanding horses' senses is also very important when people engage with these animals. It is good to know where a horse's blind spot is, and know that it will hear your approach and lift its head in that direction. However, if you are walking behind them and don't want them to scare, it's best to walk around a horse with enough distance between their hind legs and you. Another approach may be to simply place your hand on their back as you walk around them. This action gives the horse an idea of where you are.

Approaching a horse must be done in a certain way. If you are relaxed, the horse will be relaxed. When a horse is relaxed, one of their back feet will be propped up, their heads will be down and their ears slightly back and eyes maybe even be slightly closed. In this circumstance, the horse does not need to be alert or carefully aware of his surrounding. In contrast, when a person enters a horse's stable and the horse turns its body away from the person, it could be saying it wants nothing to do with them. Lastly, when a horse hears or sees something that might be threatening, it would raise its head and ears in that direction. It may try to get away from what ever may be coming at them. These situations all show irritation and fear.

### **Reading and riding a Horse**

Just as a horse can communicate with the body, so does a person. A rider should approach a horse feeling calm, breathing regularly with their shoulders relaxed. A rider's



touch and voice can give the horse cues as well. While horses don't understand words, they can hear and will see our bodies change from our emotions. Their bodies change and they react to human actions. When a rider is on a horse's back, their legs fall on the side of the horse and their hands will hold the reins that are connected to a bridle and a bit in the horse's mouth. Lastly, all the movements that the rider is cuing and asking of the horse can be felt on the horse's body, particularly on the parts that are most sensitive, which are the back, mouth and sides of the horse. These parts that the rider has in contact with the horse helps to provide a form of non-verbal communication between the rider and horse. The horse reacts to the gentle pulls of the reins from the rider directing the horse which direction to go, and also to allow it to follow other commands like stopping or starting.

In English riding, body placement is very important for directing a horse. A rider must balance their body in the saddle. This means the rider's back should be straight, and heels should be pulled back so they are in line with their hips, shoulders and ears. When seen in profile, it should look like there is an imaginary line connecting all of these parts of the body (Sellnow & Butler, 2012). For a rider, they should be aware of their body placement as well as where their body comes in contact with the horse and the saddle. The rider should be balancing their weight on the balls of their feet with their bottom placed in the saddle (Sellnow & Butler, 2012). At different speeds, the rider may shift to lifting all their weight off the saddle and just on their feet, or have their weight completely in the saddle. Each change in position results in a shift in the saddle and a shift in contact with the horse. Another way for a rider to communicate with the horse is through their legs and knees. While the rider holds on to the reins, they may give specific

directions to the horse through their legs. A rider may direct the horse to travel to the right with the moving of the arm and the reins, but at the same time they can press their left knee into the horse's side. The horse responds more to this press and shall move to the right with ease. The rider can also squeeze their knees together, signaling for the horse to increase their speed; this can also be done by kicking the sides of the horse.

A rider is aware of the body language of the horse just as the horse is able to read the body language of the rider, and both respond to each other. The rider is constantly thinking of where their body is on the horse and how they are going to direct the horse next. They have an open communication with one another based off of this reading of each other's body language. This reading can also be seen as awareness for each other. This connection is a process of reacting to one another. The process is an open non-verbal connection. Both are listening, feeling and working together.

### **Animal Assisted Therapy**

Some of the earliest use of horses in therapy was in Ancient Greece when Hippocrates mentioned it as a natural exercise (Sellnow & Butler, 2012). Since then horses have been used in therapies for children and adults who have developmental, physical, and cognitive disabilities such as autism, cerebral palsy or multiple sclerosis. Horses also have been used for therapy with veterans and others who have suffered physical or emotional trauma (Sellnow & Butler, 2012).

There are a few different categories that make up Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT). This type of therapy includes people working with animals such as dogs, cats, rodents, horses and dolphins (Rothe, Vega, Torres, Soler & Pazo, 2004). This type of

therapy has been used to create deeper connections with people and the way they relate to others. When there are barriers to communication, such as the client not opening up about themselves, or refusing to speak, working with an animal can sometimes help break down that barrier and open up new ways of working. AAT was designed to promote improvement in human physical, social, emotional and or cognitive functioning” (Rothe et al, 2004). There are a number of different types of animal assisted therapies that use horses, including Equine Facilitated Therapy (EFT), Equine Assisted Social Work (EASW), Equine Assisted Learning (EAL), Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) and Equine Assisted Counseling (EAC). All of these types of therapies include the work of a horse, the therapist or horse specialist, and a client or patient. This work strives to focus on learning goals and treatment goals such as leadership skills and relationship building (Lee, Dakin & Mclure, 2015).

### **Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy**

Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP) is one type of equine assisted therapy that can aid a person in developing and growing. EFP utilizes a team approach of a psychotherapist, an equine specialist and a horse or horses, all working together to aid the client in experiencing personal emotional healing and growth (Buzel, 2016). This type of therapy can be conducted one-on-one or in a group. The number of horses depends on the size of the group of clients. People that qualify for this type of therapy can range from children to adults, with many different mental health disorders.

One of the first considerations for a therapist and for the client is to discuss the reasons why they are attending or seeking equine therapy. This type of first meeting is to

give the chance for the therapist to get to know the client and to discuss what they would like their goals to be. Once the therapist is able to decipher the needs of the client, they can then decide what horse would be best for them. In some cases, the client may get the chance to choose between a few different horses. Horses that are picked for therapy sessions can be chosen for many different reasons. A horse may have the need for human contact just as much as the human does. A horse may suffer from PTSD just as much as a human can. Sometimes therapy horses are very young with little human touch; in other cases older horses, with fully developed personalities, are used. The qualifications of the horses vary, however they get chosen based off the need of the client(s). Horses have their own strengths to them just as humans do. It is important for a client to work with a horse that will benefit their therapeutic needs.

This choice is critical because the client may choose a horse for the wrong reasons. They may want to work on building relationships for example, but the horse may want nothing to do with the client and walk away from them or stand as far away as possible. That says something about the connection between both the horse and the client. That coupling does not benefit anyone. The client may try out a few different horses before discovering the perfect fit to accomplish the therapeutic goals they would be working on. Much of the focus of the first few sessions with the horse is about making a connection between horse and client. One way for this to happen is to groom the horse. Grooming can take place in a stall. While the horse is being groomed, the horse should have on a halter with a lead rope attached to the wall. The horse won't walk away from the client and the space between the client and the horse is reduced. In the act of grooming, a relationship forms. This relationship aids in building the foundation of trust.

While grooming the horse, it is important for the client to be calm, relaxed and to breathe. Breathing lowers the heart rate and helps the client to be present in the moment (Buzel, 2016). As stated previously, horses will touch each other with their noses, heads, or sides of their bodies. This can also be a form of communication between horses and people. If the person who is brushing a horse can be calm, then so can the horse. By brushing the horse's coat, the client stimulates the body, puts the horse at ease, and creates a bonding experience (Buzel, 2016). There are some exercises to help this bonding experience flourish and create the foundation for the relationship between client and horse. This relationship can be created over time with the help of simple exercises.

After transitioning from the stall to a corral, the dynamics of the relationship change. The horse is no longer stationary and can react to the body movements of the client. One exercise that might be beneficial is to have the client make physical contact with the horse to start the process of building a relationship. This might be as simple as the client saying hello and letting the horse respond. As noted previously, horses respond to sight, sound and smell. They read their other herd members and, when humans step into an arena, corral or pasture, they become a part of the herd. In getting to know one another, both horse and client should try to feel comfortable with one another. When walking towards a horse, one should focus on the release of tension, being quiet, and walking slowly with no sudden movements. When reaching out to touch a horse, it is also important to remember their vision and their blind spots. They can see when their back or sides are being touched, but are less likely to see someone touching their face. By placing the hand in a fist to the side of a horse's face, the horse may choose to accept the greeting by sniffing the hand or bumping it as they would another member of their herd (Buzel,

2016). In this moment of first contact, they may choose to deny the proposal of a hand or choose to accept it and accept you. After this, it is good to step back from the moment to reflect on the feelings that the client may have had in the first connection and how the horse responded.

When clients learn that they can trust a horse, they also learn about trusting themselves with the animal. Moments of introduction with the horse can lead to trust. These moments can help a person feel emotions, such as the feeling of being recognized. The horses react to what the client is doing, even if that action is just brushing them or talking with them. There are connections being made, which creates the bonds between the client and horse. This bond is the foundation for new relationships and connecting with others. In exploring boundaries, one can also explore how they relate to others around them and the types of relationships they keep. That exploration should also be done while feeling comfortable, and not in any way feeling threatened.

Horses have a sense about those around them. They feed off each other's energy and emotions. They can do the same with people. They know when our energy is heightened because we are scared, or anxious, and they can see that, and read our bodies. Buzel (2016) describes one exercise that focuses on learning boundaries called "With your permission." This activity works on the feeling of energy from the client's palms to the horse. Without touching the horse, the client can engage in the act of massaging the horse but from a few inches away. This involves a passing of energy from the client to the horse. The horse's response may be to relax and accept this transference by lowering their heads, ears and relaxing their eyes. The client can also "push" their hands against the horse's sides but still not making contact with the horse, all with the intention of

directing the horse to move. The horse may reject the energy and walk away, indicating that they do not want that transfer of energy. The horse is making the boundaries for the relationship. The client does not know how the horse is going to act with the transfer. Every action that the client does, the horse reacts to. While the goal can be to transfer energy, the client may also react to the horse's response. They could feel uneasy about it and not want to continue with the exercise. The client is given the chance to become aware of what they are comfortable with while working with the horse and continuing to build the relationship of trust.

Once trust and boundaries are established, leadership is one of the next goals that can be worked on in an EFP process. One way that this can be done is in the act of leading the horse around a corral. A person will first stand alongside a horse and prepare to lead them. Being in the right mindset is important, as is breathing and relaxing into the body. Knowing where you want to lead the horse is crucial. The client may wait a few minutes before walking, but the client's hand will be on the lead rope that gathers underneath the horse's neck. It is also important to have the hand in the right location on the rope, not too tight that the horse can't move his head and not too loose that the horse would trip over the rope or pull the client. This requires body awareness in how the breath is connected to the body and where the hand is placed. When the client is ready, they can take a few steps forward. It is the horse's choice to follow. This activity can be challenging, in that the horse may choose to pull back on the rope or stand still. Horses may choose to stand still or listen to the command. The horse may not respond because the command was not given clearly (Buzel, 2016). Evaluating the command is also about self reflection—how the command is made and what the response was—and is useful for

the client in order to reflect on how they are working with the horse and what can be improved on to continue the goal.

This leading exercise can be taken to a more challenging level where the client is leading the horse without a rope but, rather, with the energy between the two of them, requiring them to be in sync with one another. Another challenge would be to increase the pace, or stopping and starting to see how the horse responds or if they follow along. If the client switched direction, would the horse follow and turn around too? These are all different ways to engage in leading exercises, with the main objective of the client figuring out how to communicate with the horse so that the horse responds to what the client is doing.

This type of activity is the first step to building leadership. Other exercises may include continuing to work on this goal of leading the horse through an obstacle course. Speaking to the horse, physically moving the body so the horse responds—these are all ways to get the horse to move. It is about the discovery of what works, what doesn't and how it will help accomplish the goal of the client or group.

### **Equine Assisted Counseling**

In Equine Assisted Counseling (EAC), clients interact with horses to prevent or resolve emotional and behavioral difficulties (Trotter et al, 2008). In EAC, clients are also riding horses and learning how to direct them in basic horsemanship skills. As is always the case when riding horses, a rider must be aware of their own body placement to direct the horse. The rider also should be aware of how the horse is reacting to commands and directions. When a client is working with EAC, they have the same awareness, but



also are working on communication on a body level, assertiveness in directing and leadership, confidence, responsibility and cooperative relationships (Trotter et al, 2008). In addition to riding, with EAC, clients also do directional work in a corral much like EFP. Clients practice backing up a horse, having the horse step over a pole, and even asking a horse to stop and start. Horse specialists or therapists monitor all of these activities, with the goal of working through the problem spots and assessing how the client is feeling during and after working with the horse

While working with the horse, clients are reminded to have their primary focus on breath, for their breath is then connected to muscle tension and sensing emotional responses through exercises. By breathing, clients are able to increase body awareness and regulate how they self-soothe (Johansen & Binder, 2016). One releases on an exhale; this is a natural feeling that lets go of tension in the body. It can help bring awareness to the body and also in the moment. With breath a client can become aware of feelings that they are feeling in the moment. They can relax, or feel their heart racing from excitement or fear. Breath can tell us much about our human bodies, just as much as to a horse. They read us.

### **Discussion**

In EFP, the horse specialist and therapist are trained to look at the horse's body language and ask the client how they feel. The clients may not know how to express verbally how they feel in the moment. A client could be saying they feel happy when really their shoulders are slumped down, and the chest is hollowed backwards. Their words are not reflecting their body language. Just as horses bodies have their own language, so does a humans. Body language can tell more about what a person is feeling

than what words can. Sometimes that connection and honesty of what a person is feeling may not be expressed truthfully. The body cannot hide what the mind is feeling. Our body language gives away our feelings. Movement is a way for the body to be expressive, to show emotions, personality and mood (Acolin, 2016). Dance/movement therapy (DMT) could bridge the gap between words and body language, allowing a person to express what they are truly feeling with both their mind and body. It could also provide an opening in the therapeutic practice for communication to be expressed through the human body.

### **Dance Movement Therapy**

Dance/movement Therapy (DMT) uses dance and psychology to process experience and discover human core emotions (Chaiklin & Wengrower, 2009). Movement can be a form a self-expression for those who have trouble verbalizing how they feel, and can promote healthy growth of the psyche by increasing self- awareness (Levy, 1998). DMT can be an outlet to release emotions in a safe manner. Through the use of imagery and symbolism, such emotions can come forward for clients. Dance/movement therapists use a variety of tools that can help to create a connection to, and awareness of, how emotions can be expressed through the body. Interacting with props like parachutes, scarves and other sensory objects can be useful in helping clients interact with the therapist and others. Experiencing emotions together in a group setting can also be helpful for reflecting and processing, for attention may not be just on one individual. Listening to others and how they feel may help with the processing of ones own emotions and feelings. DMT can help many different populations of people with the

goal of experiencing a wholeness and feeling that both their mind and body are connected.

The mind-body connection is one of the central assumptions of DMT. Firstly, the mind-body connection is said to be everywhere in human experience (Acolin, 2016). The mind is the variety of thoughts and feelings; the body is the use of physical process related to the way a human works (Acolin, 2016). The relationship between the two is built off of the external stimulation of a person's environment and their desire or reason to act. People react when their surroundings change. This might mean that they are affected by and react to sound, touch, smell or sight. When a person moves as part of a reaction, that movement becomes a language and a form of communication. This type of language can be attuned to, and articulated by, dance/movement therapists. This helps to advance the therapeutic process by bringing awareness to non-verbal and/or unconscious communication. This can only be done if a person or group of people who are going through therapy wishes to express that communication (Acolin, 2016).

Mirroring can be a way of seeing in both DMT and ET. Mirroring is when two bodies are copying one another; they are in synch. Both the therapist and client are following what the other person is doing and expressing. The two people are moving in the moment together. The therapist strives to reflect the emotion of the client as well as accept what the client is feeling. The therapist takes the patient's non-verbal and symbolic communications and looks to help broaden, expand and clarify them (Levy, 1998). Dance therapists meet the clients where they are emotionally to understand and accept the client on a genuine level (Levy, 1998). Horses naturally mirror humans as they interact with one another, just like they would if they were in a herd of other horses.

Clients who work with horses in EFP often describe the work of the horse meeting the clients physically and energetically through a broad spectrum of emotions (Ford, 2013). As the client moves, so does the horse, based off of the client's movement. The therapist and horse specialist will reflect on the horse's emotions. Horses have the natural ability to reflect, support, challenge and guide a client (Ford, 2013).

Another element of DMT much like mirroring is attunement. This is the blending and adapting of rhythms to those of another person. Two people move together but are not mirroring; they are feeling similar muscle tension that is the same between them. This type of synchronization creates the foundation for empathy and communication (Amighi, 1990). Like mirroring, attunement involves two people or two beings that can acknowledge one another and follow one another. It is a mutual agreement between the two to have an interaction with one another. While observing, the two are in harmony with feelings and how they place the body. The connection of clients and horses allows attunement to happen because horses have knowledge of reading others in the present moment and have awareness of others (Ford, 2013). The very nature of horses as an animal of prey allows them to be instinctively attuned to the emotions and body language of other animals (including humans), as their survival relies on the ability to interpret such actions into intentions (Kemp, Signal, Botros, Taylor & Prentice, 2013). Horses rely on the cues of one another such as sounds and also by observing. When riding a horse, attunement can also be applied. A rider must be conscious and aware of what their body is doing, as well as what the horse is doing. This same concept is also applied to EAC. Clients who are working on basic horsemanship are attuning to what the horse is doing. A dance/movement therapist could increase body awareness while a client is riding. In

walking a horse, they could remind the client to breath, release the tension and feel how the horse is walking. The horse may be actively engaging its muscles but is also relaxed. Are the horse's ears relaxed but still alert, waiting to hear commands? How does the horse's body feel against the legs? What does the client feel in his or her own body from the horse's body? These questions can help the client bring awareness to both themselves and the horse.

Time, space, intensity and rhythmic flow can be found in both dance/movement therapy and equine therapy, and its communication between client and therapist or client and horse. There is an open, non-verbal awareness between both parties (Ford, 2013). The client and horse are still attuning to one another. This is another way for the client to deepen the connection in working with the horse. This relationship is the start to Kinesthetic Empathy, which is the understanding of another's "inner life" through nonverbal communication, bodily movement, dancing and verbal expression, (Ford, 2013).

DMT provides awareness of the body as well as of the mind. The connection of both is interrelated. What is important is that the therapist is able to read that connection as well. One aspect of DMT that horses naturally do as well is kinesthetic awareness or empathy. This is the ability of one person to understand one another (Chaiklin & Wengrower, 2009). It also allows two individuals to connect and have an experience together based off what the other one feels (Chaiklin & Wengrower, 2009). This connection is reflective and connected to the body by both people. This provides a new sense of awareness to how the body is feeling. Reflection can then be helpful in this moment to relate back to what the mind and the body are feeling in these types of

moments. These experiences occur when the person can see their feelings portrayed in the body of another person. They also occur when their feelings are being expressed by another person. This is the connection to the body, mind, and also is another form of communication. This type of dialogue is both non-verbal as well as verbal. It is the non-verbal communication that is the most important part. Communication between client, therapist, horse specialist and horse needs to be authentic and transparent. The relationship requires a level of openness and vulnerability in order for the therapeutic process to happen and for goals to be reached. There is currently limited research linking the practice of EFP to DMT (Ford, 2013). However, given, the common elements of DMT and EFP, a dance therapist may bring particular skills to equine facilitated therapy that would aid in the therapeutic processing for a client. With both, one therapist could be looking at the client's movement and the other at the horse's movement. The client could be given the chance to see their own reflection in another person and in the horse. They could also be given the chance to process their emotions with the expression of their body.

Dance movement therapists are given the tools to observe the human body and a person's body language. They have the tools to be able to describe what is happening in the human body through observation and language. Through the use of movement analysis, dance therapists can articulate what they see in the client. They can comment on the client's posture and placement of their body and mirror that representation of feeling for the client. With the use of breath, dance/movement therapists can aid in the connection of the body and mind relaxing. They can lead with the breath and have others follow. Breath is connected to the muscles and the holding of muscle tension is inherent

in all movement (Amighi, 1990). Dance therapists can help clients release that tension and bring awareness to the client of what their body is doing. A client could say they are relaxed, only to be taking shallow breaths, and have stiff shoulders and arms. That type of body placement and posture does not describe relaxation. A dance therapist would be able to recognize that they were not relaxed, and help them adjust their body. In an EFP session, a dance therapist could first start by breathing with the client and bring awareness to their surroundings. They could provide techniques to relax the body by breathing with to goal of bringing awareness to muscles tension and how they feel in the corral.

With the use of descriptive language, dance therapists can take those observations and help emotions become clearer to a client. Movement analysis can provide the right vocabulary for the client's movements to be talked through and explained. Words such as grow, sink, punch, float, can be used to describe a person and their actions of movement. With effort and attitude comes a direct intention in our movement (Amighi, 1990). Those movements and efforts can be described and related to images like growing like a flower, floating like a cloud or punching a pillow. Those actions can act as a symbol for and release for emotions. When working in an EFP session, a dance therapist could use imagery as a representation of either a place or feeling for the client. They could be walking to a destination and also be walking with the horse. The dance therapist would ask more about what it is that is desirable about this place and why are we walking to reach this destination. This place could be imaginative but also important for the client. An important part of this walk would be the horse accompanying the client on the

journey; this could be an introduction to relationship building and making connections with others.

Dance therapists can help the client to connect the experience in their body to what they are feeling emotionally. They have the skills to bring those emotions into their body, and express those feelings. Dance therapists can deepen the process of working through emotions that may be triggered by working with horses. When the horse moves away from the client, the client will have a reaction. The dance therapist can say what they see in the client's body, based on that rejection. The therapist may even tell them that they can walk away from the horse, to a different spot in the corral to get a new perspective. This can give the client a new relation to space, the horse and where they are standing in the space.

Humans are moving in all their interactions with the world around them. Sometimes scenarios can be engraved into the human body and resurface to only bring back negative feelings. With the connecting of emotions, memory and body, dance therapy can be used to release negative associations. Dance therapy is a way to release emotions and process what the body is saying.

This is what dance therapy can do for Equine therapy. Dance/movement therapy can help the clients in their processing. DMT can be another tool that aids in the processing of how the client feels. A horse therapist can mention what the horse is doing and ask how that feels like for the client; how does the client respond? The horse offers a new perspective on the client's actions and communicates non-verbally.

Dance/movement therapy can bridge the connection to what the client is feeling in the body in EFP, and help to make those feelings more explicit and manageable..



## **Conclusion**

In the work of DMT, it is the therapist's job to recognize and elaborate on what the client's body is telling them. They could mirror, attune, or state what they see in the client's body. Dance/movement therapists bring their awareness to these moments. Through the use of movement, they can elicit feelings and responses in the non-verbal realm, just as a horse can. The difference is that a horse cannot analyze or process what they see; but can only act on or respond to what they experience nonverbally. As stated previously, the horse reads body language of others in their herd as well as humans. Horses register sounds we make, our breath and vocal tones. They can react to touch when there is contact and their body language is a reflection of what we do with our bodies. When working with horses, they can help humans to discover hidden truths about themselves. Dance/movement therapy can help with the articulation and processing of these truths.

Clients have said that horses become their therapist because of the authentic reflection the horses give them. In those changes of body languages, the horse specialist and therapist notice the behavior of the horse. They reflect what they are seeing in the horse's body. Clients are then asked to describe how they feel, based on this new information provided by body language. In the processing of their feelings, there also is a need for self-awareness. The client should be given the chance for their own body language to be recognized and commented on. Dance therapy is a way that can help clients connect their body and mind together. The dance therapist can help communicate what they see in the client's body, and together work on that feeling.

The horse is there to help represent another reflection of their own emotions. Dance therapy can help bridge that connection of the non-verbal communication of the client. The horse specialist can do the same to describe the similar expression in the horse. Both therapies complement one another, in that they both provide the client with creating relationships with others, experiencing trust, leadership and the chance to move with another being. All of these goals related to the body, are either discovered through mirroring, or attunement for both human and animal. Both can provide a reflection of the other.

There have been little to no studies combining these two therapies. However, after experiencing the process of EFP, it has become clear that the non-verbal and verbal processing of the client is essential for the sessions to have a purpose. If any goals are to be accomplished, an open mind of the reflection of the horse can be better understood with the understanding of the personal body. With a dance therapist, and an equine psychotherapist, both the client and horse can be seen. The connections and reflections being made can be recognized and commented on. The therapeutic process can go further for the client and goals can be reached quicker. The moments of reflection, changes in emotions and body, space, time all can be looked at and asked about.

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