

Autism Movement Therapy: My Thoughts on June 13 & 14th 2015 AMT Certification Workshop

The second Joanne Lara started speaking about her program her eyes lit up with passion. I could tell from the moment she started talking that she has made her life's work in an effort to bring art to the autism spectrum community. My background is in child development so I was very interested in learning about the dance portion of the class but I was thrilled when Joanne started talking about what Autism is and about strategies to decrease problem behavior. I thought that this aspect was so important to working with children on the spectrum and was thrilled that she put so much emphasis on us understanding really what these children are experiencing and how it is simply just different from how individuals typically experience the world. Because I am not a dancer I felt lost learning the steps but Joanne was patient and kind and talked a lot about the dynamics of running a class with children on the spectrum such as using very short words to give directions and to not worry about if every person is doing every step, to just keep the class flowing. We need to meet the children where they are at, a philosophy that I highly agree with and that Joanne incorporated in the teaching of her class.

After we learned the routine her weekly Saturday class came in and I was ecstatic that we were able to actually participate. I observed closely how Joanne was managing her class and was in awe at her patience and understanding of the children. I have never met someone who really just "got it" when it comes to kids on the spectrum the way that Joanne did. She pushes them to do the best that *they* can do even if it is just making eye contact with her in the mirror. She understood that each child is different and she worked with each child on a sort of "case by case basis."

It was so interesting seeing how Joanne combined neurological findings with dance sequences. During the routines she would make comments such as what movement works what parts of the brain and exactly her motivation for adding a certain dance move into her routine. Although from an outsiders perspective the class may seem like a kids dance class like any other however, Joanne really incorporates research based methods into every part of her class. Getting up and moving with the children was a lot of fun and an excellent way to be introduced to the therapy.

I really appreciate what Joanne is doing and I think she has the perfect background to do it. My experience in the Autism field has primarily been research and Applied Behavior Analysis therapy (ABA). Although in ABA we may work on skills such as eye contact and gross motor imitation we still do not put a lot of emphasis on movement and music and there is very little incorporation of art. I agree that art is where children on the spectrum thrive and would recommend anyone in the field to at least become aware of these types of interventions in order to open their minds to what potentially may be extremely beneficial to our children.

Best,

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