Bands and Balls for Baby Boomers

Kimberly Dye M.S. BC-DMT

Abstract

The use of circular whole body stretch bands and small molding balls in movement therapy provides unique ways for the dance therapist to address the physical, mental, and emotional issues of aging. This sensory approach stimulates our proprioceptive and neuromuscular systems responsible for increased receptivity, assimilation, and memory.

Description

Today, the oldest baby boomers are already in their 60s. By 2030, about one in five Americans will be older than 65, and some experts believe that the aging of the population will place a strain on social welfare systems. Whether you work in a hospital, school, or private setting, as dance/movement therapists it is important to have an understanding of our Baby Boomer population- those between ages 55 and 70. Coping with physical change and limitations, identity shifts due to retirement, and achieving a new perspective of an integrated self are major issues related to this demographic.

Movement that is sensory, developmental, rhythmic, and includes group interaction goes a long way with building confidence and success. In this workshop we will use molding mini balls and Stretch-eze®, wide soft whole body resistance bands that enhance proprioception by increasing tactile and vestibular inputs and promote sensory integration. New neuromuscular connections are made which

contribute to balance, postural stability, and easier access between right and left-brain functions. (Ayres, J. 1979, Gilbert, A. 2003)

Slowing down and listening to the feedback of a well-placed tactile cue can sometimes be the stimulation needed to create awareness and a new engagement with our bodies. With aids of deep pressure and resistance we see improvements in restricted spinal mobility due to inactivity, muscle imbalance, low tonicity, core strength, and balance. Establishing regular meeting times, moving in circle and group formations, mirroring with verbal cueing and sensory props, and allowing time for verbal sharing can satisfy feelings of not belonging and general lack of socialization prevalent with this age group.

Developmental movement follows a progressive natural flow that reflects and evokes motor patterns normally unfolding in the first year of life, i.e., Breath; Touch; Core-Distal; Head-Tail; Upper/Lower; Laterality; Cross Laterality; and Vestibular. (Green-Gilbert, A. 2003. Bainbridge-Cohen, B. 1994). Foundational in our movement training we know that creating movement patterns that reflect progression through developmental stages is less stressful on the joints and muscles and assist in re-patterning movement habits that may be inhibiting freedom of movement and personal movement expression. Lamont (1991) further likens this neurological re-patterning work to spiritual practice in that clients feel "grounded, in touch with (their) wholeness or holiness." The workshop structure will also be developmental in that it begins with movement on the floor, progresses to chair work, standing posture and balance, and finally moving in small and large groups.

As we move through developmental movement patterns within the cocooned elasticity of Stretch-eze, our spines becomes more fluid, core access and initiation more pronounced, and movements more weighted. Most importantly, our receptive/responsive states, or brain to body messaging is strengthened by sensory integrative work. We become more able to adapt to unexpected changes in the environment such as stepping off a higher curb than expected or avoiding a moving object in our pathway critical for avoiding falls.

Studies have shown that resistance exercise increases bone density and reduces osteoporosis, a major risk factor in aging. (Page, 2003) Using elastic resistance out-performs free weights in attaining overall peak muscle action. (Hughes and McBride, 2000) Like the resistance of spring action used with Pilates apparatus (Herman, E. 2002), Stretch-eze resistance exercise is within a closed kinetic chain which creates stability and protection for the hip, knee, and shoulder joints while enabling the exerciser to load the activity at the extreme range of motion, pushing the individual to their kinetic edge without undue pain or potential joint injury.

The Stretch-eze is highly effective for dynamic resistance stretching (Cooley, B. 2005) which involves two directional movement, towards and against the line of direction. As the muscle stretches it also contracts creating more stability at the joint. As in most movement techniques we find Newton's third law of motion at work: "for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction" or response in the body. Wrap the springy, circular, fabric band around the shoulders and feet to provide a tensegrity of forces (Fuller, R B. 1979), a feedback loop between upper

and lower body, right side, left side, back to front, and cross laterality. Single leg circle in shoulder foot wrap helps stabilize the elongated side while the circling leg moves freely giving the user more core control and less overuse of ball and socket joint. "The opposing pulls of tensions are also reaffirmations of a center as the quintessential balance point between them." (Bartenieff, I. 1980). This dynamic pull towards and away from one's body center increases tensegrity, balance, and coordination. In Yoga and other Eastern philosophies, the body center is considered to be the center of one's being, the place of beginning and end, that from which all movement emanates, the point of balance. Joseph Pilates referred to this body center as the "powerhouse" the area that resides between the rib cage and the line across the hips. (Gallagher, S and Kryzanowska, R. 1999)

Alternation between resistance and release is demonstrated by introducing small molding balls. Rolling, rocking, pulsating movement with the balls help expand breath capacity creating a sense of space, buoyancy, and fluidity throughout the body. Placed between shoulder blades, diaphragmatic breathing becomes deeper increasing breath capacity and reminding us of the importance of breath for increasing oxygen, energy, and calm. (Dye, 2000) Initiating movement while supine or sitting in a chair with the ball placed under or behind the sacrum helps achieve core/distal for proximal initiation and head/tail for spinal mobility. Since lordosis and/or kyphosis can become more pronounced as we age, placing the ball between the shoulders blades or knees can heighten awareness and help fire the agonist muscles needed for achieving good postural alignment.

The direct pressure and massaging effects of the ball and band against the body can also be pleasurable, which overrides or distracts from the discomfort of stretching a tight muscle or strengthening a weak one. The tactile experience of being held or supported satisfies many older person's desire for being touched in the absence of a spouse or diminished libido.

Designing our movement programs to involve social interaction clearly defines us as Dance/Movement therapists. Moving together with the aid of the sensory props can bridge the movement and social phobic client and create an element of fun. When we become more confident in mastering our bodies' limitations we are more willing and able to move within a group context. Socialization happens naturally as clients become more relaxed and self-assured. Sensory movement demonstrated in this workshop assists our boomer clients in achieving a strong core and sense of an ever evolving self on a path of continuous growth. Come learn new ways of moving with this enthusiastic population and brush up on your basic movement therapy skills.

References:

Ayres, A. Jean. (1979). Sensory Integration and the Child. Western Psychological Services, Los Angeles, CA.

Bainbridge-Cohen. Bonnie. (1994). Sensing, Feeling, and Action. The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering. Contact Collaborations

Bartenieff. Irmgard with Dori Lewis, (1980). Body Movement. Coping with the Environment. Gordon and Breach, NY. Page 108

Buckminster Fuller. R, (1979). Synergetics. Macmillan Publishing Co. Page 372

Cooley, Bob. (2005). The Genius of Flexibility. Simon and Schuster, New York, NY

Dye, Kimberly, (2000). Get On The Ball…Movement and Exercise that Integrate Body, Mind and Spirit. Dyenamic Movement Products www.dyenamicmovement.com/cd. Audio CD

Dye, Kimberly, (2012). Pilates Mat with Stretch-eze Level I. Dyenamic Movement Products. Seattle, WA DVD

Gallagher, Sean P. and Romana Kryzanowska. (1999). The Pilates Method. BainBridge Books, Philadelphia, PA Page 13.

Gilbert, Anne Green. (2003). The Brain Dance, Variations for Infants through Seniors VHS 85 minutes www.creativedance.org

Herman, Ellie. (2002). Pilates for Dummies. Hungry Minds, Inc., NY. NY. Chapter 15.

Hughes, C.J., and A. McBride. (2000) "Comparative Electromyographic Analysis of Shoulder Rehabilitation Exercises Using Isotonic and Elastic Resistances." In Review. In Page, Phillip, Ellenbecker, Todd S. (2003). The Scientific and Clinical Application of Elastic Resistance." Human Kinetics. Page 12.

Kranowitz, Carol Stock. (2003). The Out-Of-Sync Child Has Fun. Activities for Kids with Sensory Integration Dysfunction. Berkley Publishing Group. NY. NY. Chapter 1.

Lamont, Bette. (1991). Interview by Cat Saunders. "Having Problems? Maybe Your Brain's not Working". www.drcat.org/articles_interviews/html/bettelamont.html

Page, Phillip and Todd S. Ellenbecker. (2003) "The Scientific and Clinical Application of Elastic Resistance" Human Kinetics.