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Dance/Movement Therapy:
A Proposed Intervention for Meeting the Unique
Psychosocial Needs of Highly Gifted Children

A DOCTORAL PAPER
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

BY
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This paper will demonstrate that the literature suggests and experts observe that intellectually gifted children, children with exceptional cognitive abilities, experience a unique set of psychological, social, and developmental stressors. Research has demonstrated that individuals with intelligence quotient (IQ) scores far above the mean tend to experience greater socio-emotional difficulty than their average-intelligence peers (Gross, 2002). For some gifted children the challenges and stressors they face may lead to areas of difficulty, including emotional functioning (including heightened emotional intensity, sometimes described as emotional overexcitability), affect regulation, development of the self (including perfectionism) and interpersonal functioning. As a result, some highly gifted children are likely to benefit from participating in psychotherapy, particularly in the context of a non-judgmental, non-evaluative environment.

One such therapeutic environment is created in the process of a type of expressive therapy called Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT). The focus of DMT is the process of creating movement as opposed to the product, which fosters a safe, non-evaluative environment. Additionally, this treatment modality has been used to treat children who struggle with awareness and expression of feelings, identity development (including confidence and self-esteem), psychological adjustment, and social relationships (Cohen & Walco, 1999; Henley, 1998; Holyoake & Reyner, 2005; Isaacs, 1977; Meekums 2008; Mendelsohn, 1999; Rakusin, 1990; Spindell, 1996). The emotional, social, and developmental challenges faced by some gifted children may impede their ability to

realize optimal functioning and adjustment. This paper will make a case that DMT has the potential to be an efficacious intervention to treat this population.

This paper will explore and define giftedness; address the social, emotional, and developmental challenges some gifted children face; and discuss considerations for working with gifted children in a psychotherapy setting. Additionally, this paper will introduce DMT as a potential treatment modality for addressing the challenges faced by highly gifted children and describe an exploratory study to examine the efficacy of this treatment modality. The proposed study will investigate the efficacy of a DMT group in improving children's affect expression and regulation, development of self, and social functioning through its emphasis on self-awareness, affect expression, effective coping through movement, and self-esteem.