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The challenge of working with the embodied mind in the context of a university-based Dance Movement Therapy training

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ABSTRACT

Developing the necessary skills for a dance movement therapist, such as working with emotional conscience, accessing the knowledge of the body and enhancing the intelligence of feeling, are only some of the objectives of a Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) training. Experiential groups included in psychotherapy training seek to provide opportunities for reflection on interactions and other important learning for future therapists. In this article the experience of conducting such experiential groups at the Autonomous University of Barcelona is shared through vignettes, portraying some of the emotional aspects that are being activated in both, movement and verbal groups.

Special attention is given to the challenge of working with the lived, embodied, experience and the embodied mind in an academic context which commonly emphasizes purely intellectual concepts and evaluation criteria that may at times over-determine free expression of feelings. The multidisciplinary approach adopted by the training is taken into consideration (the Marian Chace approach as well as Authentic Movement elements within the DMT field, along with Group Analytic Psychotherapy and a general intersubjective psychological orientation), as is the multicultural nature of the groups, composed of students coming from nearly twenty different countries.

Introducing the concept of intercorporeal knowing for the learning processes of a Dance Movement Therapy training

The following article deals with the challenge of working with embodied, emotional awareness in an academic context. As lecturers on the university based master's and postgraduate programmes of Dance Movement Therapy (DMT), we would like to share our experience of working in a context which commonly emphasizes purely intellectual concepts and evaluation criteria that may at times over-determine free expression of feelings. DMT is multidisciplinary in approach and it has been our goal to integrate minds and bodies, somas and psyches, the verbal and the physical in this training process, without overvaluing one aspect over another.

Our master's and postgraduate diploma programme in DMT is hosted by the Department of Clinical Psychology and the "*Aula de la Dansa*" of the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* (UAB).[1] Whereas the postgraduate diploma course represents a larger introductory course in DMT with about 30 European Credits (ECTS), the full training as a dance movement therapist requires the entire master's programme with 100 ECTS, a training involving between three and four years of time. In some courses, such as group supervision or the large group, students from different years may share classes, and this mixture of students, from different levels of training and yar groups, shapes, generates and enhances the group dynamics within the entire body of students.[2]

The DMT training group and the large group are courses that take place during the entire first two years of the training: The large group is an experiential verbal group which meets every weekend of the training during one hour. It includes all students from the first and second year of the training and as such offers the only space on the course where all students have a chance to meet and share verbally, and experience the group as one whole body (the group-as-a-whole). The DMT training group consists of smaller movement

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[1] The UAB is one of the five most important universities in Spain, according to the latest QS world university ranking classification system (Gutierrez, 2010).

[2] From 2003 to 2012 more than 280 students have passed through the training: 31%, of the students are psychologists, 16% are trained dancers and the rest come from a wide range of backgrounds, such as medicine, sociology, education, only to name a few. The vast majority of our students are women, aged between 25 and 35. Only a few of our students are older than 40, and there is just a very small percentage of male participants, a common feature in many DMT training programmes (Payne, 2010). Most of our students live and work in Catalonia, but the number of students who travel from other parts of Spain to join the course, is usually quite high. A total of 34% of the students come from outside of Spain, Mexico and Chile being the countries that attract the largest number of students, but also other European countries such as Portugal, France, Germany, Italy etc. This variety of nationalities and cultures influences greatly the functioning of the groups.

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groups, including generally from 7 to 16 students and one or two facilitators that meet twice every weekend for 1.5 h. The objective of the DMT training group is to offer the students the possibility to take part in a DMT group and become familiar with the setting and development of a movement group. From a first person stance they can experience a broad range of possible interventions in DMT: through the creative process in movement they can explore the symbolic dimension (Best, 2000; Chorodow, 1984; Meekums, 2000; Schmais, 1985; Stanton-Jones, 1992; Vulcan, 2009) and investigate their transferential reactions towards the facilitators, other group members, the master's in general or the university as an institution, as well as the group's present fantasies.

The students thus learn to become conscious of the interconnections between bodies, psyches and individual actions. They start to engage with the concept of the collective body (Adler, 1994), as well as intercorporeal experience, a concept introduced by Merleau-Ponty (1968) which is similar to Trevarthen's (1977) notion of intersubjectivity.' Merleau-Ponty's work, however, emphasised the embodied experience, thus broadening Trevarthen's notion when referring to a "shared corporeity" or "intercorporeity" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 141–143). This intercorporeity can be defined as "the capacity to understand another person's action through the body prior to, and as a condition for, cognition (Atkins, 2008, p. 48).

Fuchs (2004, 2012), too, stresses the notion of intercorporeal knowing and links it closely to Stern's and the Process of Change Study Group's concept of implicit relational knowing (Lyons-Ruth et al., 1998), a theory of prototypical experiences with significant others, a bodily knowing of how to deal with others.

> This early intercorporeality has far-reaching effects: Early interactions turn into implicit relational styles that form the personality. As a result of learning processes which are in principle comparable to the acquiring of motor skills, people later shape and enact their relationships according to the patterns they have extracted from their primary experiences (Fuchs, 2004, p. 4).

This implicit corporeal knowing refers to knowing how to treat others from a very early stage onwards and was defined by Fuchs (2004, 2012) as one of six types of body memory.[3]

Our article builds on the above mentioned concepts which underline the importance of intersubjective, intercorporeal processes and acknowledge an implicit, bodily knowing. It values and enhances the shared corporeity and embodied learning and works with the knowledge and wisdom of the body, attempting thus to involve not only the students' thinking faculties as would be expected from an academic institution, but also their emotional and physical capacities. Subsequently experiences from two different courses[4] in the training will be shared, courses that are so called experiential groups – spaces where experiential and integrated learning takes place through the lived experience in movement and words.

Experiential learning – working with the intelligence of feelings

At times, experiential groups may at times be quite similar to therapy. However, its main goals evolve around the students' understanding of the clinical setting and supply with opportunities to learn more about different possibilities of therapeutic intervention. Through the experiential groups the students learn to develop their capacity of observing their own sensorial, emotional and mental experience and to improve their abilities of interpersonal communication through symbolic movements and words

> For Payne (2010, p. 208) it is crucial to give DMT trainees the experience of symbolizing their own feelings as part of a training programme, experiential methods such as the personal development group can provide the opportunities for these imperative experiences.

At times the experiential groups, specifically the large group, function as a barometer – the group as a pressure gauge for measuring the current 'emotional' climate on the training. That the atmosphere or the mood of the large group provides those running a therapy training with a useful reading is beyond question. Current issues usually concerned with change, teacher absence, tensions within or particular characteristics of the staff group or matters with a broader institutional implication, usually find some form of expression within the large group.

> Indeed, if we apply systems theory ideas, The isomorphic principle requires that operational definitions of the structure and function of any one system in a hierarchy can be applied to other systems in the same hierarchy. When system structures and functions are described comparably at different system levels, then what is learned about the dynamics of any one system can contribute to understanding the dynamics of all other systems in the same hierarchy (Agazarian, 1987, p. 3).

One of the features of the particular academic context in which the training takes place is the split occurring between a small group of practitioner teachers, largely dance movement therapists, who constitute the 'core team,' referred to earlier,[5] and the larger group of university academics who deliver a good proportion of the didactic curriculum but play little or no role in the organisation and administration of the training. This is mirrored in the large group by the struggle to let go of the role of teacher. Many students start off in the group with pen and paper in hand awaiting instruction. When none is forthcoming, students sometimes begin to assume teacher or leader role characteristics and propose activities such as: giving introductions, taking turns, movement activities... Nonetheless, the presence of a member of staff who, because this is a university, students assume to be evaluating their participation serves only to intensify feelings of confusion and doubt. With the communication through movement channel apparently closed the verbal channel feels fraught with uncertainty, fear and doubt. "What can I say here?", "Who is listening?" and "What can or should we talk about?" are typical expressions of the frustration felt at the beginning in relation to the absence of any clear definition, structure and task. Experiential learning and academic learning collide at this point, a matter exacerbated by the facilitator not providing direct answers to direct questions.

A further dynamic, emanating from the academic/experiential divide, concerns the relationship between speaking and silence. In the academic context communication through words is

[3] Fuchs (2004, 2012) defines six forms of body memory: procedural memory, situational memory, intercoporeal memory, incorporative memory, pain memory and traumatic memory.

[4] Our courses are taught by a total amount of 30 intervening staff, including guest lecturers from all over Europe and South America, but also professional members of the Spanish Professional DMT Association as well as lecturers from the Department of Psychology of the UAB. A core team of 6–10 members, mostly teaching staff who are directly involved with experiential classes, tutorials or supervision of students, participates in regular staff meetings and exchanges the most vital information about students. A smaller team, consisting of teaching staff concerned with experiential classes, intervises on a monthly basis the group processes. All three authors of this article belong to this smaller team of staff.

[5] Fuchs (2004, 2012) defines six forms of body memory: procedural memory, situational memory, intercoporeal memory, incorporative memory, pain memory and traumatic memory.

disproportionately over-valued, consequently students experience their silence as disproportionately problematic. There is greater pressure to speak to gain attention or to speak to make an impression. Many students withdraw into an angry resentful silence. Silence is often described as a waste of time or a wasted opportunity. The group facilitator has regularly made the following intervention quite early in the life of the large group, underlining that it is easy to feel that silence has no value in this group, but that it is important to recognise that silence, listening and attentiveness are the ground upon which any form of conversation or dialogue depends. In our opinion, silence is the precondition, the invisible necessary labour that makes the group possible.

Shame, amplified by the academic context, becomes a factor early on when the student feels herself being exposed and, because this is a university, evaluated. The more retentive students are further driven into defensive and self-protective silence. Hadar (2008) discusses shame as an interpersonal and essentially group based phenomenon. Through her discussion of shame in the group that emanates from being seen or witnessed, i.e., as a person with a body in the presence of others, she questions Foulkes' (1964) core group analytic concept of the matrix

> the common shared ground which ultimately determines the meaning and significance of all events and upon which all communications and interpretations, verbal and non-verbal, rest (p. 292).

The matrix for Foulkes is the basis of mind. As such he situates mind as emerging from the relational space inside and between people. For Hadar (2008) this fails to take into account bodily and social origins of emotions such as shame. She therefore proposes matrix as the group 'body-mind'. Interestingly the Spanish translation (as with the Hebrew) of matrix, which in English has a powerful abstract and mathematical principal meaning, is *matriz*, also meaning *womb*.

In her qualitative, phenomenological, research study, Payne (2010) describes a set of five major themes that emerge throughout experiential groups: ending and loss; rivalry/envy/jealousy; one's own needs being met; anger; and sexuality. These are themes that surface in our large group and DMT training group. Experiential groups within a therapy training offer opportunities for reflection on the interactive process, as well as other important therapist skills and processes (Payne, 2004). The participants' consciousness of their own "lived experience" provides thus a crucial learning experience for future clinical practice (Payne, 2010).

The large verbal group contributes to the development of embodied emotional consciousness, through its emphasis on the importance of the emerging bodily sensations and feelings, some of which are extremely uncomfortable, that students tend to experience both on the course and in the large group. Feelings are intelligent insofar as we are able to know, or are open to knowing and taking them seriously – and by this we mean: that we are able to passively and actively experience within our relational world as wide and deep a set of feelings as both we and our relational world can bare. The relationship between feeling and emotion helps to clarify, with the former denoting individual subjective sensory and bodily experience and the latter implying the expression in the presence of others of the feeling. This is a reminder of Malan's (1989) "goal" for each and every moment of psychotherapy: to put the person in contact with as much of their true feelings as they can bare. The large group, like much of the experiential training experience, helps the student to learn that what they are in touch with, i.e., what they feel, however uncomfortable, is intelligent in that it meaningfully belongs to the relational context in which it occurs.

Subsequently, two situations from the DMT training group are described: the first shows the existence of a field that includes all present members, but still cannot be considered as a moment of group consciousness. The second, on the other hand, shows an advanced group that is capable of metabolising its dynamics, through metaphors and images shared by the totality of the group, an indicator of a rising collective consciousness.

First vignette, third weekend of the first year of the training

The group starts with an attack from some members of the group. The organisation and general sense of the master's is questioned. At the same time a certain tension can be felt in that part of the group that remains silent, with bound flow,[6] passive weight,[7] little grounding and accelerated breathing. Such a reaction is quite frequent during this phase of the training. It is difficult to process all the information that the students receive about the functioning of the training and of DMT in general. The fear of not being able to fulfil all the requirements of the training appears. It is understandable that the students project their sense of not feeling adequate outside, more so as some students have been accepted for the master's and others only for the postgraduate degree. Contradictory feelings within that part of the group that remains silent can be intuited.

During the warm-up, which focuses on bringing attention to the feelings in the body as well as the movement and rhythm of the body, a strong resistance can be observed, a lot of bound flow, neutral time and weight which may indicate a lack of connection between body and mind. For that reason, and given the fact that the group still has very little autonomy in the capacity to improvise as well as certain difficulties in relating amongst each other, an activity with a specific object is proposed. In order to enhance the capacity of play and to loosen the defences it feels appropriate to focus on a particular object rather than the proper bodies.

All members receive a certain quantity of small sticks, sized about 10 cm, which can be spread on the floor, leaving certain spaces between them and allowing for free play.

From the beginning the group starts moving with a lot of urgency. It seems to respect the proposal mechanically without being able to play. Even though the idea involves the relationship with the space, very little attention to the space can be noted. Some members interfere with others carelessly and, without noticing, destroy the figures created by others. An active interchange amongst all is generated quite quickly, dominated by flow, time and weight.[8] Action predominates over consciousness, the search for a discharge of tension can be observed. Nevertheless one couple places itself apart and constructs a defined form, modulating their efforts with a lot of attention given to their actions. There is a constant flow of action without any moment of indecision in what the couple is doing: one participant places around and on top of her partner many of the little sticks. Shape, flow and action are interflowing in a harmonious way and, observing the activity, they felt

[6] The Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) offers a system to describe, classify and analyse human movment. The element of flow is one of the four efforts defined by Laban, describing specific qualities of movement. The flow effort refers to the freedom or constraint of how we allow our breath to flow in movement. Regulating our breath allows continuity or containment of flow: we speak about "Free" or "bound" flow, related to our disposition of controlling or giving freedom to the expression of our impulses and feelings.

[7] The category of weight refers to another effort quality within the LMA Framework: an action can be executed with "strong" or "light" weight. It is a category that deals with the physical sense, the body, the skin and the muscles. The use of weight describes the intention that is used for the action and tells us about the "sense of self" of a person. Passive weight describes a moment of letting go, the body gives into gravity, there is no "sense of self", a lack of physical presence as we can find it in heavy depression or third age.

[8] This particular combination of three efforts where there is no attention or intention towards space is called "passion drive" in LMA and indicates a state where emotions and feelings predominate.

truly "moved"[9] (Whitehouse, 1979, p. 82). It looks as if a big bonfire is being constructed.

Later on the same participant comments that she saw her partner as a witch and wanted to burn her. There are few comments on the group and nobody mentions this particular image. The feeling of anger and fear remains contained within the group without further visible elaboration inside the group (García, 2012, p. 109).[10]

The general choreography and the emerging image remind us of a field that includes the totality, a field of fight/flight (Bion, 1961) and a theme that cannot yet be understood, contained or elaborated by the group. Thinking in terms of Lakoff and Johnson (2003, 1999) who argue firstly, that the mind is inherently embodied, secondly, that thought is mostly unconscious and thirdly, that abstract concepts are largely metaphorical, the group seems to process their issues in a purely embodied, unconscious and metaphorical manner at this stage of the group's development.

Second vignette, last trimester of the second training year

During previous sessions the group has shown itself able to confront the difficult theme of rivalries between group members. During the initial check-in the group talks about their individual differences, the possibility of laughing about them, to be able to share more difficult aspects now that they have developed more trust as a group. For the warm-up an experience of different ways of walking in time and space is proposed by the facilitator. The group moves dynamically while occupying most of the space. Only one person, after having moved with some sustained movements on the edge of the group, allows herself to fall on the floor at the far end of the hall and remains in a horizontal plane. After a few minutes a large quantity of newspapers is offered to the group which brings the group to dynamic and varied action. The paper is torn apart, balls are formed to be thrown or kicked around, some "dress up" with the papers, modify their bodies or the body of others. But quite quickly the group finds a common action: coming closer to the person who has remained on the ground they start packing almost all the paper under her clothes, until she is completely filled. Her figure transforms, the group lifts her up and walks with her to the centre of the room while she herself stuffs a last paper ball into her mouth. In the final verbalisation, images appear about something that is going to be eaten such as a huge pig, but also images of a dead body and a ritualistic dimension. From these images different associations are shared of what one "eats" when participating in a group. Somebody adds that there is also the digestive-elaborative part of the group and the expulsion of these contents that are being put back into the circle.

The scene transforms when the lifted person is being put back to the floor and the newspapers are taken out of her clothes in order to be used again by the group. This time a circle is formed, but the group actions are characterised by a lot of free flow and lots of variety. While all tear and throw newspaper a song emerges containing the names of all the authors used in the different bibliographies of the master's: "Laban, Bion, Neri, Winnicott, Stern, . . .!" They play with these names, singing them with different voices and qualities that they associate with the name. A lot of laughter fills the place and the action only finishes when the session comes to an end. During the final verbalisation someone shares how important it was for her to observe the group "utilising rubbish to create, recreate and rescue 'broken bits' and articulate in a group action."

It seems as though in these moments the group has more mature intersubjective consciousness with a high capacity to create associative chains between members and reflect upon these. The participants act in unison and, attuned to each other, the group can be perceived in its totality with a shared emotional climate. In DMT these experiences facilitate the experience the embodied notion of "the vital dynamic flow that allows us to be with the other" (Stern, 2005, p. 45). The fluid dynamics between emerging action, images and words show, in our opinion, how the creative process in movement is able to activate a continuum between implicit knowing (Fuchs, 2001; Polanyi, 1969, 1983) and reflective capacity (Stern, 2005; Dosamantes-Beaudry, 2007). By developing a consciousness of their own presence the students start to build up the necessary capacities to offer an adequate therapeutic presence (Robbins, 1988) as future therapists. Developing an inner witness, a receptive consciousness in order to observe the experience of the "present moment" (Stern, 2004, p. 4) without being conditioned, is what allows experiencing "the body-felt connectedness among people" that is "profoundly related to the source of our humanity" (Adler, 1994, p. 193).

Dealing with the "primordial soup of opposites"

DMT as a multidisciplinary approach integrates a variety of theories and approaches and so requires a constant dialogue between the different constituent parts. De Maré and Schöllberger (2003) situate the idea of dialogue in a dualistic, as opposed to monistic, frame, within which there is a constant dialogue between two entities. The dialectics of change and evolution, within which thesis and antithesis interact over time to produce a higher synthesis, drive the group forward. Within our experiential groups a few such dualities have been: moving and speaking; speaking and listening; body and mind; I and we; private self and social self; individual and group; first year and second year; chaos and order; container and contained, explicit and implicit, postgraduate diploma and master, and so on. Zinkin (1989) writing about the search for wholeness describes as so fundamental to groups the capacity to be able to hold chaos and confusion. For Zinkin, this meant immersion in "the primordial soup of opposites" (ibid, p. 255). In this constant dialectical process, which is moving towards a sense of the group as a whole integrated body, students begin to recognise the primary importance of conflict in the pursuit of growth and development. The following vignette illustrates the theme of the large group as a nascent democratic body with internal dialectical tensions:

Third vignette, 4th session of ten

The coldness of the room and the lack of natural light (there are no windows) is an ongoing theme. However, today is a mild day, yet the heating has been on all morning and the room feels oppressively hot. The facilitator switches the heating off just before the session begins. Ten minutes into the meeting and a first year student stands up and walks to the door, which she opens. A second year student expresses her discomfort at this individual course of action, taken without consulting the group. The group splits along the lines of a first year subgroup supporting the action of their colleague and a second year subgroup arguing for action based on group decisions. Frustration is expressed that the group is wasting time on this theme, while others argue that the issue goes to the heart of what the group is about. The issues of safety and boundaries emerge – that with the door open we are exposed and vulnerable. The facilitator points out that nation states spend much time debating the management of external frontiers and that here we are also

[9] Chodorow (1984, p. 269) defines "to be moved" as "a moment when the ego gives up control, stops choosing, stops exerting demands, allowing the Self to take over moving the physical body as it will." This type of experience can clearly be encountered in Authentic Movement groups, but also in this type of experiential DMT groups.

[10] Translation from Italian by xxx.

exploring internal differences and boundaries. Ten minutes before the end of the session a member of the university staff appears at the open door asking why we are there. The facilitator responds to his colleague that her class is scheduled to start after the group. This happening relieves the group of much tension, there is much laughter and shaking of heads at the relevance of this event to the theme of the group. By the end of the session it feels as if something has changed, that the group has recognised that it has borders, i.e., a body, and that what happens inside these borders is of relevance to all.

Conclusions: the search for wholeness – body and mind

In our DMT training we perceive the group "as a whole, a collective community able to think and elaborate emotionally" (Neri, 1997, p. 23),[11] containing all participants, including the facilitator or therapist. The group generates a field described as a "transpersonal deposit" (ibid, p. 86), similar to Hader's matrix described above. Through the creative process in movement and through words different dimensions of intersubjective experience are explored, as illustrated in the different vignettes of the article. It is essential for us to integrate the lived experience, focussing on the body, its perception, sensing and feeling capacities, even though at times this is extremely challenging for our students and staff who are more used to conventional academic learning and less to embodied, experiential learning.

Our experiential teaching approach stresses nonlanguaged ways of knowing (Panhofer, 2011; Panhofer & Payne, 2011), and builds on the idea of an embodied cognition and the embodied mind. For us, (. . .) the perceiving and thinking subject is not a purely intellectual cogito, but one's self-aware, proprioceptive sensory-motor, and cognitive body, a 'my body' (Atkins, 2008, p. 3).

Together with Gallagher (2005) we believe that the contribution of embodiment to cognition is inescapable, and consider thus the interplay between experiential and academic learning as vital for future therapists. Paying attention to the propioceptive sensory-motor and cognitive body allows us to get in touch with "the present moment" (Stern, 2004, p. 4), a moment of self awareness, necessary to connect us with the intersubjective consciousness or intercoporeity of the group. As a psychotherapeutic training our objective is to contribute towards the growth of consciousness necessary to activate the therapeutic presence. We consider the lived, embodied experience thus as a vital part of our DMT training, as a bridge between minds and bodies, the verbal and the physical, our thinking and feeling capacities.

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[11] Translation from Italian by xxx.