

'When there is more than one: some considerations for managing group dance therapy'

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Some philosophical thoughts...

Influence of existential phenomenology

Originating from the writings of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) existential phenomenology takes as its central tenet matters concerning the notion of existence – namely, issues to do with an individual's being and that individual's relationship to the world and to others (Spinelli 1995). The philosophy offers the concept of 'being-in-the-world'. This concept suggests that we are unique in our ability to be aware of our existence but that this awareness also reveals an inseparable relationship between existence and the world. Our awareness is therefore inter-subjective.

An existential approach to therapy centres on an exploration of a person's particular way of seeing life, the world and themselves in the world. The therapist attempts to assist the client to regain more mastery and control over their lives in order that they may experience a more authentic being-in-the-world. The therapeutic goal is to assist the person to establish what matters to them, so that they can become more in tune with themselves, and therefore, more real and alive (van Deurzen-Smith 1988).

Synopsis of key phenomenological elements:

1. Bracketing – or the 'knowing nothing' about a person and their way of being. The concept involves a withholding of assumptions, especially to do with predicting behaviour/ expecting certain behaviour (which is impossible to do but is nonetheless intended). This requires a particular distancing in order to allow openness; maintaining a curiosity or a needing to know about the person;
2. Description – maintaining a descriptive awareness, which requires staying with the level of what is being presented and not going beyond what has been offered. So, one opens/ examines the offer from what is there rather than from what may lie underneath or behind the offer (also impossible to do but is intended). It is about explanation, not interpretation;
3. Equal valuing - treating every statement (gesture/ action) with equal value rather than forming a hierarchical value judgement about what is meaningful or most important to the person in what they say (or do).

The Entity of Group:

'Through the enactment and sharing of their art expressions, individuals have the opportunity to receive both the benefits of the private artistic search and the support and validation offered by a group. Engagement in a therapeutic artistic community allows the person to transcend individuality through a celebration of group expression. Group consciousness does not have to imply the absence of individual differences. A sense of the collective can embody the individual and highly differentiated expression of group members. Feelings of inclusion and group identity are often most complete in the knowledge that the individual differences are accepted and encouraged' (McNiff 1981 p. xvii-iii)

Influence of the Interstitial Arts movement

Interstitial: forming, situated in, or relating to one or more small openings, gaps, or cracks –

Interstice: from the latin roots 'inter' (between) and 'sistere' (to stand) – literally, to stand between or to stand in the middle...

in geology - located in the pores or between the crystals of a rock

in chemistry - relating to a compound, e.g. a carbide, in which ions or atoms of a non-metal occupy positions in a metal lattice

in physiology - lying between parts of an organ or between groups of cells or tissues

An interstitial thing falls between categories. Interstitial works are in a constant state of 'coming-into-being', unclassifiable.

The notion is coterminous with 'liminal', from the Latin 'limen' meaning threshold, or 'limes' referring to boundary. Liminality is a concept made known by Victor Turner when referring to the in-between state initiates go through in rites of passage. Liminality is a suspended state, but there is an underlying idea that it is also transitional (Heinz).

Structure of the SSDS dance therapy sessions:

Phase One – Warm Up (self to self)

- ▶ aims to settle participants into the dance space and orient awareness to the self via the body
- ▶ therapeutic focus for participants is the self in relation to self
- ▶ all participants are invited one by one for an 'accompanied solo'

Phase Two – Development (self to other and the environment)

- ▶ acknowledgement of 'group': the intention is highly relational in quality and focuses on awareness of self to other/ self as part of a group

- ▶ movement exploration is via collective play and often includes new/other ways of moving
- ▶ movement cues serve to encourage awareness of and interaction with others, and invite spontaneous, collaborative and inter-related engagement

Phase Three - Cushion Rest & Closure

- ▶ cushion rest provides a moment for stillness or rest from the moving
- ▶ the rest provides the students with an opportunity to relax and sense the qualitative difference between the body in motion and the body in stillness
- ▶ therapeutically it is a time for processing the movement experience

References and Readings:

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www.interstitialarts.org