

Therapy or Therapeutic

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This article stems from a paper I first presented at a NECTA (Network for Exploring Creative Therapies Through the Arts) conference in Sydney in 1995. The theme of the conference was about experiencing different types of therapies and how they impact on an individual or a group and, I suppose, I took a 'devils advocate' role.

The language used to describe therapy-therapeutic depicts a particular mindset: a way of viewing the world and how the individual and group in society and cultures exist and co-exist with each other. It will vary from country to country, culture to culture, society to society and community to community. But since living in Australia, I have been intrigued by the use of the two words to explain what it is dance therapists do. Maybe living in the United States, I took it for granted that the two definitions were automatically understood. Or the lines between therapy and therapeutic were not so blurred. Now, living away from the United States, I think it has changed because the cultural influences have become more relevant.

All of us at some point in our lives have had a feeling of enlightenment or confusion in regards to an activity we are engaged in, whether for personal growth, a hobby or a passing interest. The process of giving insight – which I call "Uncovery" – usually surfaces when experiencing a wide range of human emotions while engaged in an activity, and is unconsciously associated with past experiences, which may have caused some degree of pain, joy, distress, happiness or guilt. Whether it is an activity specifically aimed at "uncovering"* as in revealing or finding the meaning, or the activity inadvertently promotes "uncovery", depends on the circumstances. In all therapies there is a degree of "uncovery" but in dance therapy because of the non-verbal element it is very powerful for the client and the practitioner. It lends itself to reciprocity which in my use of the term therapeutic fits. (This not to say that I am not flexible about the relationship, but fluid with its application). **The question then arises whether the activity an individual is engaged in is therapeutic, or therapy, or both?**

The dictionary definition of therapy proposes an organic disease is present. The understanding of diseases and their processes is based in scientific language and philology. It states that a disease exists when signs or symptoms can be classified or identifiable from a physiological perspective only. In other words a parasite needs to exist within the

host. While feelings of guilt, anger, pain or shame may not be classified as organic they can be metaphorically speaking concerned parasites. The person responsible for the diagnosis and treatment of the disease has the power through knowledge to cure or heal. The intermediary between the patient and the doctor is medicine.. This represents a relationship where the doctor is empowered, whereas the patient plays a more passive role and is often then not there for the confirmation of answers to the symptoms and assigning prescriptions.

A look at the definition for the word therapeutic stems from the art of healing. A branch of medicine concerned with the positive constructive treatment for a person in sickness or to maintain health. The practitioner/facilitator/catalyst has knowledge of disease and sickness both from a psychological and physiological perspective. Both client and "doctor" are aware that the process of healing can only occur when the mind and body are working in harmony. This indicates both patient and "doctor" are actively involved in the process of healing. This process allows for the reciprocity of alternative options for both persons/people to engage in the healing process. For me, this definition holds the most holistic approach for it takes into account the total person, the aesthetics of healing and time, Its about letting time reveal the past, to confront the present and move on to the future, which dance therapy fits in well with.

This is an ongoing defining of therapy and therapeutic. I don't know if a clear definition can ever be agreed upon or whether it is a positive that the definitions of these two words can be flexible and redefined based on political, cultural and economic influences. Political, cultural, social and economical perspectives will always be involved in transforming the definitions of what is perceived as therapy or therapeutic. This is the result of a growing understanding of medicine, disease and its treatment, and most important the psychological wellbeing of its citizens.

*These are my own definitions and interpretations.

Ed. Note: Theresa's definitions of therapy/therapeutic are interesting and quite possibly different from those understood by many of us. Perhaps readers might like to give their response. Regardless of semantics, there are two issues which are usefully raised in this article:

1. Is dance therapy merely a matter of getting people to dance and letting dance do its work of "healing", or is intent/purpose and special skills required for it to be dance therapy? This is an important issue for professional identity.
2. The broader issue is a philosophical one which asks where dance therapy fits within the health/healing field. Does it align itself with the traditional medical model where the doctor is expert, identifies symptoms, diagnoses and delivers a cure, with the patient as relatively passive recipient, or does it align itself with the more relational, holistic approach where both play an active role? **JG and HH**