

# Personal Highlights and Impressions Of The 37th Annual ADTA Conference,

**"Roots and Revelation: Dance/Movement Therapy Forging New Collaborations,  
Innovations, and Freedom"**



Linda Murrow

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Certainly the business of roots held a certain weight for me as I arrived 'home' with my family from Australia and, along with my mother, made the journey north from Boston to Vermont complete with a dusting of snow. Attending the 37th Annual ADTA Conference, the first I have attended since moving to Australia 13 years ago, was as much a kind of family reunion for me as it was a conference, with old friends and colleagues gathering together to celebrate, share, and ponder dance therapy and the meaning it continues to have in our lives on so many different levels. Perhaps this is one of the qualities that best describes this extraordinary gathering of human beings in a hotel in the quaint New England state of Vermont: that we choose dance therapy as our work and profession, but that it also has an essential place of importance in our personal lives, and views and experiences of the world and humanity. I was overwhelmed by the sense of belonging at a very deep level, and the experience of being embraced by a community of kindred spirits, among them the familiar faces of some of the human jewels of our profession, which in itself made the whole event worthwhile.

A feature of my experience was the 'in-between' times, the unscheduled, impromptu connections and

conversations that took place while making my way from one scheduled event to the next. Long walks along Lake Champlain, particularly at sunset, were a highlight. One day I joined three dear friends on a walk to a beautiful sandy beach along the lake where we formed a circle and moved together. It was magical and moving, as we had each in our own way 'grown up' with seven children and many life experiences between us, since working together as dance therapists in a Boston hospital fifteen years ago. The whole conference itself was a real opportunity to witness and to be witnessed by dance therapists, to share in the process of 'growing up' collectively as a profession, and to appreciate the individual ways we each express and integrate dance therapy in our lives.

The Conference was itself a collaboration with the University of Vermont, Center on Disability and Community Inclusion, which held a pre-conference forum on the role of movement therapy in the education of children, including individuals with disabilities. This was open to the public and attended by parents, special education professionals, and others. William Freeman, a dance therapist and specialist in the disability area, showed a film he had made about his work called *You're Okay Right Where You Are: Expressive Movement in Education*. The film was very professional and informative, certainly worth viewing or obtaining if you have the opportunity.

## **Nancy Beardall & Rena Kornblum, Violence Prevention and Intervention: Integration Within The Curriculum And Community**

Nancy and Rena both do similar work in secondary and primary school contexts respectively, though they developed their approaches independently of one another in two different parts of the United States. Rena began with an experiential exercise and then gave a comprehensive overview of her movement-based violence prevention program, including video footage, with school - aged children in Wisconsin. She described activities that promote and deal with spatial awareness, self-control, energy modulation, managing anger and building sensitivity, along with the teaching of techniques for pro-active intervention such as saying stop, distracting, and ignoring when approached by a bully. Rena has written a book about her work called *Disarming the Playground - Violence Prevention Through Movement*, has two training videos, a training manual and work book available by contacting her on [rbkornbl@facstaff.wisc.edu](mailto:rbkornbl@facstaff.wisc.edu)



Nancy works as a wellness and prevention counselor for secondary schools in Newton, Massachusetts (my home town and where I went to school!) She has developed the "Creating Peaceable Schools: Confronting Intolerance and Bullying" curriculum for secondary school students and co-authored *Making Connections, Building Community through Gender Dialogue*. Nancy has been involved in the public schools for 20 years in a variety of roles including dance teacher. Beginning with a review of the key teaching tactics used in successful violence prevention programs, video footage provided a glimpse of the work she does with young people, and the impact her program has on the whole school community. Nancy also has an excellent student workbook and unit guide. This session was extremely informative and left me with a desire to be an intern again, following Rena and Nancy around to learn more about what they do. Very inspiring regarding the professionalism they each bring to what they do, and the far-reaching importance of the work they are doing.

#### **Joan Chodorow, Embodied Imagination: The Inner Landscape And The Invisible Friend**

Joan's presentation, which was extremely popular and a bit oversubscribed, was an opportunity to revisit some of Joan's rich ideas regarding the multi-sensory nature of fantasy and its role within human growth and development. Joan began by speaking about the history of psychiatric literature in which fantasy has been viewed as pathological, though she saw this view as changing. She then posited her view, with support from other theorists, that *fantasy has a healing function*. In this way she demonstrated the value of fantasy in guiding development. She made links with the imaginary companion in children between the ages of 3 and 7, highlighting the healthy process of fantasy play in early development. We were all invited to explore these ideas through movement and then to draw and share with other participants. For me, this experiential was particularly rich. Joan continues to be a pillar of inspiration for many dance therapists with the capacity to integrate her highly developed intellect with her down to earth embodied presence and lively openness.

**Susan Imus & Lenore Hervey** led a stimulating and challenging session titled "**Truth, Beauty and Goodness: Research, Aesthetics and Ethics in Dance/Movement Therapy**". A mouthful, and a very full session. Lenore began with each of us writing down our associations to the words 'truth', 'beauty', and 'goodness' and finding a movement for each. This was then developed into a group movement experience. From this we shared and pondered our associations to these charged words and the values they hold for us as people and therapists. Links were made to 'research', 'aesthetics', and 'ethics'. Lenore's book, *Artistic Inquiry*

in *Dance/Movement Therapy*, may be of interest.

From there, Susan spoke of the need for dance therapists to notice what actually informs their interventions within sessions, relating this to the aesthetic preferences of the therapist. She was interested to explore what it is we are paying attention to in the session, and to give voice to this as our dance therapy theoretical framework. A movement session was facilitated with some participants moving and others observing. Within the session, movers were invited to make interventions at any point, and to notice what informed them in that moment, i.e. what was going on in the group that made them do what they did. This led to a fascinating discussion in which participants of the session seemed inspired to take up the challenge before them. Susan is the Chair of the Dance/Movement Therapy Department at Columbia College, Chicago where Lenore has recently joined the faculty. Stay tuned for further development of these ideas.

#### **The Art And Craft Of Professional Writing, sponsored by AJDT Co-Editors**

This session was led by a panel of experienced therapists with particular expertise in writing, including Jane Wilson Cathcart, Sharon Chaiklin, Ann Lohn, Anne Fisher, and Joan Lewin. We were given an opportunity to write and share in small facilitated groups. Feedback was given and supportive materials provided (articles on professional writing and a copy of the editorial checklist). It was inspiring to be a part of a group where professionals were supporting each other and allowing for vulnerability and 'not knowing' in the writing process. As I left that room I thought to myself, "this would never happen in any other profession..." An excellent workshop that is sure to be repeated.

#### **Janet Adler, Keynote address titled "From Autism to the Discipline of Authentic Movement"**

Janet's keynote address was breathtaking in its beauty, scope, depth, and clarity. I felt everyone in the room was transported and transformed by what she shared with us that morning. Janet stood at the podium for what felt like a long moment to breathe and make eye contact with her listeners/witnesses. She began and from that moment her presence was felt and never wavered. Janet embodied and spoke of the importance of presence, of the choices we have in our lives and the way in which these choices create our becoming. Janet described Authentic Movement as an invitation to become more fully who we are, and spoke of the development of the inner witness as a fabulous way of developing consciousness. Janet made links between Authentic Movement and her early work with autistic children where there is an absence of an inner witness. She spoke of the mover's prayer being that of the autistic child's prayer: "see me so I can see myself". Working with children with autism and practising Authentic



Movement both involve the process of compassionate witnessing of *movement becoming conscious* within the context of relationship. Quotes taken from Rudolf Laban, Mary Wigman, Isadora Duncan, and Martha Graham were used to highlight the way in which each was striving for presence and expressed a 'longing for the divine'. She asserted that with regard to the ordeal of loneliness, isolation, and suffering, we human beings are all the same. To receive and discover the gift of ourselves is her goal.

Janet was eloquent in her weaving together of her life's work, and finished her address with a gesture that the whole audience mirrored and shared in profound gratitude for her offering. Janet's newly published book on Authentic Movement, *Offering From The Conscious Body: The Discipline of Authentic Movement* deals with the individual body, the collective body, and the conscious body as experienced within Authentic Movement practice.

Following the keynote, I was fortunate enough to attend a supervision group with Janet Adler in which participants were able to present and discuss their work with clients and questions about the Authentic Movement Process. Through this session I have made contact with a dance therapist and fellow Authentic Movement practitioner who is Australian and lives in the US. She will visit family in Melbourne and we will get together early this year.

Penny Lewis, Marion Chace Foundation Lecturer,  
"Dancing with the Movement of the River"

Penny's talk was significant in many ways, not least of which being the fact that she has been suffering from a serious illness. Penny was also one of my dance therapy lecturers at Lesley College in the early eighties. Her courage in being before so many people in a formal setting at this time in her life gave a certain edge to her whole presentation. She gave a complete narrative, rich with detail, of her long career as a dance therapist. I believe her talk will be published, as is the tradition, in the ADTA journal.

**Research Poster Session**

The Research Poster Session was exciting and full of living, breathing examples of creative, embodied research in dance therapy. One of the things that struck me was how excited the presenters were about their own research, and the lively discussions taking place.

**Eighth International. Panel, "Global Innovations and Collaborations", Miriam Roskin Berger**

The International Panel was well attended on both sides, that is the audience and the presenters. So much so that the time seemed too short for the task. It appears that in

future years a new structure for the panel may be explored. Still, we heard from Argentina, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Sweden, Australia, and Croatia. Mimi Berger, who is a stellar representative and facilitator of international input into the dance therapy profession, was given recognition for her efforts with the International Panel. Thank you Mimi.

**Banquet and dance**

The Saturday night banquet and dance is a highlight for lots of reasons, but in particular for the dancing that takes place! Not to be missed if ever you get to an ADTA Conference. The next one, incidentally, is October 16-19, 2003 in Denver, Colorado. The 2004 Conference is planned for New Orleans.

**Dance Performances**

During the closing ceremony there were two dances which were each very uniquely beautiful and particularly so for me as I know many of the dancers. The first piece, introduced by Norma Canner who was also one of the performers, explored a news item from the New York Times that dealt with a Vietnamese mother looking for her son's bones after losing him during the war. Dressed in black against a beautifully painted black and white backdrop of the countryside in Vietnam, the dancers improvised and portrayed the emotional landscape of this scene. The second piece, choreographed by Nancy Beardall, told a story of personal material which was linked to archetypal themes that dealt with the relationship between daughter, mother, grandmother, and the process of coming out of darkness into the light. The sense of renewal and rebirth that I felt at the end of this piece is still with me. A great finish to a wonderful Conference.

