

Study Abstracts – An Invitation

We continue with our series of abstracts of research carried out in Australia. Although this study is not directly dance therapy research, it's parallels to therapeutic practice are acknowledged and the findings relevant to Dance and other Arts Therapies. The following study was completed by Don Asker in 2001, to fulfill the requirements for his doctorate through the faculty of education at the University of Melbourne.

"Personal meanings and artistic processes: a study of multi-modal improvisation"

Don Asker

Thesis Abstract: This study illuminates the experience of improvisation across modes of artistic forming. It examines the perceptions of a number of artists, including the researcher, who participated over an extended period in a series of multi-modal improvisations and related artistic constructions. Experiential phenomenology, heuristics, and hermeneutics inform the research methodology. The study explores ways of describing the inner experience of artistic making in the context of individual and collaborative processes involving movement, sound, forms of writing, speech and the medium of film.

The study uses a phenomenological method to describe the experience of four multi-modal improvisers (using movement, vocal and instrumental sounds, and speech) through a series of improvisations. Individual and group core themes of experience are also described from which a depiction of improvisation experience is constructed.

In a second and emergent phase of the study an auto-reflective approach is employed to explore meanings arising from the researcher's immersion in the initial experiential data of the improvisations and his subsequent imaginative speculation on artistic possibilities.

Finally, a third phase of the inquiry employs a personal narrative method to tell the story of four artistic processes that occurred parallel and subsequent to the series of multi-modal improvisations. In this phase, the constructed, written and performed materials of the collaborating artists and co-researchers are an integral part of the presentation of the findings.

The study's emergent methodology and the juxtaposition of phenomenological, hermeneutical and 'narratives of the self' approaches, reflects postmodern, feminist, and constructivist influences on qualitative research and artistic practice.

Intersubjectivity is a feature within both the experience of artistic making and the methodology of the researcher's investigation. The parallels to

therapeutic practice are acknowledged and the findings have relevance to dance, music and multi-arts therapy.

The artists and co-researchers involved in the study were all based in Melbourne, Australia. The data were sourced through interview, written reports, journals, and other modal (non-verbal) forms of expression such as visual representations, diagrams/schemata, movement, and vocal responses. Original copies of manuscripts, artwork, voice and video recordings constitute the research documentation.

The study allowed the following major findings to be revealed:

- The participants of multi-modal improvisation had unique kinaesthetic and somatic experiences. There were however invariant constituents to the experience of multi-modal improvisation including moments of 'doing or acting' without conscious premeditation, feelings of uncertainty or insecurity, intention, the forming of concepts and shared aesthetic frameworks.
- The processes of artistic forming involved intersubjective responses in which personal meanings emerged and were communicated. The artistic form(s) reflected awareness of corporeal experience, the particularities of spatial environments and time/moment, and memory/remembered experience.
- There was continuity to themes of participant experiencing across various forms of artistic expression or modes of artistic forming. There was also continuity of subjects of artistic representation.

The thesis, completed in 2001 is available at the University of Melbourne ERC library in Parkville, or at Victorian College of the Arts.

We continue to invite all those who have completed such studies to forward the abstracts to one of editors