

## Book Review

A critical review of Dunphy, K., Guthrie, J., and Loughlin, E. (Eds). (2009). *Dance Therapy Collections Number 3*. Melbourne: Dance Movement Therapy Association of Australia (DTAA)

### Evaluating the woven tapestry of Australian Dance Movement Therapy



**Reviewed by Penelope Best** I was honoured to be asked to write a review of the DTAA Collections Number 3, as I have great admiration for the dance therapy community in Australia. This admiration is founded upon repeat visits there to conferences, to run workshops, to engage with supervision and sightsee some of the vast country. Whilst there I connected with a sense of the thriving DMT community whose members openly share their ideas with each other at

conferences and through publications with the wider DMT field abroad. I am writing this review from a perspective of someone who has been a dancer in both the USA and UK, trained as a DMT in the UK with American connections, practiced in the UK, run DMT Masters training in UK, supervises DMTs in numerous countries and professionally trains DMTs in Poland, Croatia, and Netherlands. While this mixture of cultural inputs influences my take on the publication, the important lens I am using when reviewing the DTAA Collections is that of President of the European Network for Dance Movement Therapy. This calls my attention particularly towards core issues of development for professional standards while negotiating issues of diversity. I have therefore, chosen to focus my review upon connections between European and Australian professional development aspects rather than critique the extensive range of clinical practice examples covered in the book.

One of the main differences I perceive between the UK DMT field (now called DMP, Dance Movement Psychotherapy) and the Australian/ New Zealand DMT community is the readiness to share professional experiences of setting up work, and publishing these experiences, whether raw or refined. In the UK community this open sharing may have been delayed by a longer history of defining, regulating and registering practice and practitioners possibly felt judged in the process and early on less likely to write openly. I note that a number of authors within the Dance Therapy Collections call for increased registration, regulation and professionalising of the field within Australia. Paradoxically while such a move does develop a profession's profile, without it the practitioners in Australia have possibly felt freer to put forward a diversity of work without perceived professional criticism and therefore produced more conferences and association publications than has happened in the UK. However, in the past decade there has been a definite increase in sharing of expertise (particularly Masters theses) both through the now digital ADMP newsletter, *e-motion*, and the more recent international journal (with a distinctly European focus) the new prestigious *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy* journal.

What is striking about the Dance Therapy Collections 1 (1992), 2 (1999), and now the recent number 3 (2009) is the archived development of the profession. I notice that while the publication

is still called 'Dance Therapy Collections', the professional association's name is now listed on the website as Dance-Movement Therapy Association of Australia, rather than Dance Therapy as before. I am more used to referring to DTAA as one of the few national associations who promote the dance connection strongly within their professional title, while most other nations use either 'dance movement therapy', 'dance/movement therapy', or 'dance and movement psychotherapy' or 'dance movement psychotherapy'. The book does not enlighten the reader about what lay behind this shift of title, though it may have arisen from a widening sense of the role of diverse interactional movement, as well as dance, within lived praxis. Another influence is alluded to in the chapters concerning research and evaluation which highlight the profession's need for speaking to, and being recognised by, other professionals who may have already formed negative opinions about the seriousness and role of 'dance'.

The publication under review is based upon material developed from the DTAA 2007 conference, 'Weaving Threads', and demonstrates a maturity of attitude, substantiated through both evidence-based and phenomenological research. There is also an increase in supportive literature and extended bibliographies from previous DTAA Collections. I found myself excitedly turning to each bibliography as I was reading to check out a new name or source. What is also notable is the expanse of authors, viewpoints, and topics while still at its heart the Collections fosters a connection to the spirit and artfulness of dance.

In the Foreword to the book American pioneer DMT Sharon Chaiklin refers to the 'distant location of Australia and New Zealand' and how impressive it is that DTAA has maintained links with world- wide DMT community (p.4). Such a USA-centric or Euro-centric view belies the fact that Australia has potentially the 'oldest surviving culture', the Aboriginal culture, with a history of using the creative arts therapeutically (Welch, 2010). DMT practice could be said to echo core aspects of ancient creative arts rituals which use the expressive arts in gathering, sharing rhythm, transformation, 'deep listening' (Ungunmerr-Baumann, 2009), and honouring of both the homeland and ancestors (i.e. generations of family systems).

*"Place is palpable. We live in a specific context, feeling all that is around us. Perception interweaves past with present and with expectation about the future."*  
(Olsen, 2002, p. 202)

In my experience of visiting DTAA conferences rituals of recognition and thanksgiving always play an important role. I was intrigued to find this welcoming and honouring ritual also in another conference context though not in Australia, nor about DMT, yet one which also valued the arts – The Art of Management in Banff, Canada (Best & Force, 2008). Again as in Australia the landscape is vast and awesome with a history of peoples revering the earth, while in practice now managed ostensibly by a one government with two official languages both of 'new comers'. In contrast in Europe there are tracts of land (and cultural groupings) that have repeatedly passed from hand to hand and now a defined diversity of politics, culture and boundary (as well as a multitude of unrecognised ones!). In Banff, Canada at the start of the business conference Canadian Indians welcomed Australian Aboriginal elders in honouring the sacred landscape site. I was struck by the similarities with what I had experienced in Melbourne and how such deeply reverent rituals referring to vast shared terrain are missing within European arts, business, and DMT conference gatherings. As DMT Christine Caldwell reminds us 'people move and belong to movement communities just as they speak and belong to speech communities' (Caldwell, 2010).

While many DMT pioneers within the USA were heavily influenced by the diverse movement communities and languages of European folk dance, the current DMT scene in Europe now leans more towards psychobiological and interactional somatic phenomena as the basis for interventions (Payne, 2006). Europe was also the seat of psychoanalysis and of psychodynamic concepts that continue to influence both verbal and non-verbal therapeutic approaches (Koch & Braunger, 2006). Within DMT practice in the UK it appears that now psychodynamic approaches are balanced by co-creative, person centred and body based perspectives (Karkou and Sanderson; Best, 2000). Australian DMT has been influenced strongly by American pioneer DMT Dr Marcia Leventhal (2008), who offers a combination of paradigms. Leventhal balances a place for frames/ structures (Newtonian) alongside multiple, plastic and transforming realities (quantum) and never loses sight of the power of dance.

The editors of Dance Collections 3 have woven together and balance in one publication a range of practice approaches, theoretical perspectives, clinical and non-clinical examples, geographic settings, and philosophical positionings. The design ethic with a mixture of photos, graphic images, charts as well as the font and column sizes stimulates the reader's interest quite apart from the content. The layout of the book into four main sections means that readers can either dip in chapter by chapter or be directed to one section or another. The editors elegantly shift the reader from the profession's history and the centrality of movement observation, to surveying both local and global trends within research and evaluation of praxis, and on to wide ranging applications and examples, ending with a reminder of the essence of dance. The final section is somewhat curiously titled 'Skill development and professional issues for dance movement therapists' which as a title might be more appropriate for the previous two sections. The slim final section containing two chapters might be better entitled 'The soul of dance movement therapy'. One can imagine a lively editorial discussion about where best these two chapters might sit, e.g. what might be the effect of wrapping around them all the chapters on application or of having them as the book's final thoughts?

The spirit of dance is emphasised from the opening chapter in which keynote speaker Sharon Chaiklin describes dance as 'a short word for weaving the patterns of life', through chapters surveying history and current practice, to others evaluating the evidence of benefit to clients, and back round again: a rich basket. There is indeed a lot of weaving within the publication, between similarity and diversity. The authors are almost all from Australia (with the exception of American experts Chaiklin and Hackney) and almost all are dance movement therapists. There is support from a senior psychologist, Tromborou, offering avuncular advice about successful ways of gathering relevant evidence of benefits to clients. The majority of the authors have multiple professional hats or skills that they combine in the service of the client. These include: physiotherapy, social work, psychology, midwifery, choreography, writing and performing, Egyptian dance, yoga. The client groups presented are also interestingly varied including people who experience: postnatal depression; trauma, anxiety, eating disorders, war trauma,

normal neurosis, birth, attachment issues, terminal cancer, generational isolation, and a search for self development. Description of such a range of clinical expertise and reflection is certainly helpful for other dance movement therapists from other countries with similar client groups.

As I said earlier I have chosen to focus upon professional development issues rather than the specifics of the clinical work. Therefore, I would like to highlight 3 chapters that resonate with professional developments within European DMT. Two chapters act as surveys of the profession: Chapter 4 looking world-wide and Chapter 6 looking across practice within Australia. And a further chapter 5 calls for more effective linking of verbal and nonverbal theories within DMT training.

In chapter 4 Jane Guthrie DMT, CMA, a crucial figure within the development and maintenance of the DMT in Australia locates the field within professional parameters. Guthrie outlines the history of the association, trainings, legislative recognition, remuneration and conditions of employment. A survey of the professional development of DMT within 6 other countries reveals 'global trends' concerning training standards, professional recognition, membership numbers and licensing, partnerships with either psychotherapy/counselling or the arts or physiotherapy/ body therapies, and direct or alternative routes to professional status. The information concerning European countries is now somewhat out of date as the field is developing so quickly.

Being credited within the chapter as one of the communicators on European issues, I would like to clarify that I had spoken from my position as President of the European DMT Network, not as this chapter states, from the position of an as yet to be legally founded professional European Association. The European DMT Network Board and a Constitutional Steering group have been working since a meeting in Talinn, Estonia in 2007 to officially establish EADMT (European Association of Dance Movement Therapy). However, the Network itself has been in existence since 1997 discussing different training and professional standards (as opposed to information in Chaiklin's chapter implying the work has only recently begun p.10). The work was dramatically halted in April, 2010 by the environment, in the form of a slow moving volcanic ash, which meant

we had to cancel the crucial inaugural meeting in Germany. We had successfully completed applications for 16 European professional associations that met the standards to join an emergent EADMT, and had all legal requirements in place, quite an achievement! The official inaugural gathering had to be changed to October, 2010 when a formal Board is to be elected and hence legitimised to fulfil the major aim of shared practices and standards across Europe.

Developments in Europe are echoed also in Chapter 5 in which Sandra Kay Lauffenburger DMT, CMA (Certified Movement Analyst) argues for DMT trainings to promote expressivity of movement alongside a specific framework for understanding psychological processes. Within Europe a requirement for trainings to be recognised within EADMT member associations will be components on psychological theories and processes. Lauffenburger argues that trainings in Australia either offer too wide a range of psychological concepts and approaches or focus primarily on the creative movement rather than the relationship. It appears that a strong focus upon dance roots and expressivity in Australia might have led in some cases to a split between the importance of words and movement. Lauffenburger is keen to develop what she calls a 'theoretical marriage' of verbal and non-verbal frameworks to find the one most effective. I look forward to developments within her future publications as these could be of great benefit to establishing equivalency and coherence across European trainings.

In chapter 6 Kim Dunphy, Tessa Hearners and John Toumbourou survey in great detail the practice of 41 DMT practitioners in Australia. The chapter concludes by summarising both the challenges and the ways forward for the growth and professionalization of the field in Australia. Each of these challenges could relate to issues within European DMT either as reversed mirror images or as echoes. The challenges include: 1. broaden the age of practitioners (within Australia there is a need for younger DMT as trainings have been closing, while in Europe we are legislating for maturity as some trainings had been undergraduate level); 2.increase the geographic spread of DMT (within Australia practice is concentrated in conurbations in southeast of the country, whereas in Europe we have needed to limit geographic spread while still including as far as Ukraine and Russia); 3. improve cultural

competence of practitioners (within Australian practice there is little diversity of gender or cultural background of practitioners who are primarily of Anglo-European heritage; whereas in Europe the cultural diversity of clients is enormous due to migration patterns, though sufficient gender and racial mix of therapists remains a challenge); 4.improve evaluation and research, ( this DTAA publication promotes this, and the international journal BMDP mentioned above does the same for Europe); 5. increase numbers of professional members ( essential for Australia and a major aim for EADMT to increase professional associations standards of registration); 6. improve lobbying power towards pay and working conditions (note that within the NHS in the UK pay for arts therapists has been significantly raised, while in Europe generally EADMT aims to act as a strong lobbying body); and finally 7.create alliances with other professions (for Australia there is a need for parity and recognition, while in Europe we have decided not to join other larger European professional bodies when creating EADMT.)

As soon as I read Dance Therapy Collections Number 3 through for the first time, I recommended the publication to my supervisees in the UK, Japan, and South America and to students within three training programmes (in Netherlands, Croatia and Poland), hence the dissemination of Australian practice is well under way within Europe and beyond. And I am only one reader! Clearly connections with the American DMT community continue to be very strong and dissemination will be happening there also. It seems that the world-wide DMT community is closer than ever, and while the 'old world' (Europe) can learn from the 'new worlds' (USA, Australia), we can all learn from the more ancient cultures who are looking after the souls of our lands. Whatever we choose to call ourselves as a profession I hope that we do not lose respect for diverse practices and values, that we honour our elders, (ancient and otherwise!) and that we are mindful of our often privileged and powerful positions in relation to those with whom we work.

The DTAA publication keeps alive the search to answer core questions identified by practitioners in the USA 40 years ago. Chaiklin identifies these as 1.what factors distinguish DMT from other kinds of therapy using the body? 2. does using a movement vocabulary (and I would add movement observation system) arising from one

dominant cultural source alienate clients with different cultural backgrounds? and 3. what methods of evaluation make it possible to identify effective therapeutic factors in DMT? (p.9). These questions are ongoing and the field needs more publications such as Dance Therapy Collections 3 to grapple with them. As well as pondering these essential professional queries, this basket of goodies is woven through with a golden thread of the spirit and power of dance.

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#### **Ed. Note:**

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