

LIFEdance!

Live your dance, Dance your Life - A Reflection

Anjali Sengupta



As I made my way to the workshop, I was excited and exhilarated having read Sara's articles a few weeks earlier. LIFEdance is described as a "facilitated process for personal and professional development that

draws on DMT, leadership development, anthropology, performance, poetry, martial arts, coaching and neurolinguistic programming." (Boas, 2009, pg. 28) The method incorporates creative exploration, using the symbols of the elements as a way of accessing inner resources or "our own natural power". The elements not only describe the world that surrounds us but also represent the qualities that exist within each individual - the earth, water, fire and air in each of us. According to Sara, when we explore the symbolism of the elements and embody these different states of mind, we access inner strengths and resources that nourish, transform and "inspire our sense of self". The focus of LIFEdance is not just on self but how self relates to other, the community as well as our natural environment, the world that we live in.

Sara's words resonated deep within me and seemed to bring together my two worlds - Transpersonal Art Therapy and Dance/ Movement Therapy. The transpersonal approach is a psycho-spiritual one that acknowledges the human beings quest for meaning and inherent ability to self heal, and draws on ancient spiritual traditions as well as new paradigms of thought and concepts of consciousness. As a Transpersonal Art Therapist, I was familiar with working with symbols and states of consciousness as a way of connecting to inner resources, bringing into awareness personal mythologies and unconscious patterns. I wondered how Sara would incorporate working with the symbolism of elements in a DMT context to enable individual as well as collective transformation - especially within a corporate environment. My curiosity was piqued!

The Workshop:

Live your dance, Dance your life

*Grounded in earth, logic and structure;
Flowing and ever changing as water, fluid and flexible;
The passionate commitment of fire, the get up and go of a spark;
Transparent like air, authentic and clear;
The mystery of quintessence, presence, spirit, collective and the transpersonal.*

Anjali Sengupta



Attending to the body

The morning started quite organically with participants moving, stretching and simply attending to their bodies as gentle music played softly in the background.

When we came to rest seated on the ground in a large circle, we were introduced to Sara and her partner Joss who was there to provide live drumming and to assist in holding the space. Sara began by first ensuring that we could all see each other, encouraging us to move and shift positions till we could make visual contact with everyone in the group. My attention was instantly drawn into the room, present to myself and to each member of the group. Sara invited us to co-create a space to be free and express ourselves, and to share the responsibility of holding the space for each other.

A quick note about recurring themes:

- **Co creating the space**
To honour the sacred space, we were requested to turn our phones on silent and find somewhere else to make calls - a novel and very effective way of addressing this most pertinent modern day issue! Throughout the day we actively maintained the energy in the space. During breaks some of us would stay in the room and hold the space while others left to have a drink of water or go to the toilet, etc. We were often asked to hold the space for each other in silence so that we could stop everything and absorb the moment and every aspect of our experience while honouring each other and the sacredness of the space.
- **Seeing and being seen: Self - Other - Community**
We were often asked to look at each other, make eye contact, acknowledge self, acknowledge other and the community through eye contact and to find different ways of connecting nonverbally with each other. This gave us a chance to see and be seen and further reinforced the three points of focus that was an underlying theme in each exploration as we attended to self, other and community throughout the day.



Ways of connecting

Part 1: The Questions

“Einstein once said ‘You cannot find the answer to a question with the same kind of thinking that produced the question.....’” Sara Boas, 2009.

In the first half of the workshop, we explored a question that we had about our professional lives. We introduced ourselves in turn and expressed

our questions in gesture and voice while the group mirrored this back. I am always amazed at the depth of meaning and emotion that can be communicated with a simple gesture. As a group we then repeated each other’s questions and gestures to create a “symphony of questions”. As Sara encouraged us to explore and embody each others’ questions, we began to move across the space. Gradually the sounds and movement in the room started to build up to a vibrant crescendo. I felt myself become someone else’s question as they became mine.



Becoming someone else’s question

The space reverberated with the sound of one collective question - our individual questions transform into one collective voice!

The answers are in earth;
The answers are in water;
The answers are in fire;
The answers are in air.

As Sara explained- Earth, Water, Fire, Air and a fifth element (wood, metal or quintessence) are universal symbols that have existed in all cultures since ancient times. Just as we use LMA to describe movement, Sara uses the language of the elements as a metaphor to evoke imagery and movements that allow us to access and express different aspects of our selves. We were led through an exploration of each of the elements in turn starting with the most dense, earth, then

water, fire and air. Vivid imagery and metaphors were offered to deepen our connection with each element. I felt my body being led through vast oceans and gurgling streams. I become a blazing fire, a mountain and a gentle breeze. Around me, others in the group also danced with abandonment - some on their own, others in pairs, triads and small groups. There was a strong element of play that spontaneously erupted as we explored a wide variety of movement qualities, rhythms, shapes, sounds and body percussion. The music, live drumming and collective energy of that wonderfully eclectic group was the perfect setting to just let go and dance!



Just letting go and dancing

The answers are in quintessence:

Like the mythical alchemical reaction that converts metal into gold, quintessence combines the energies of all four elements to create a fifth. We explored quintessence for the answers to our question, to find our inner gold. We were asked to find one movement that represented the essence of quintessence. We simplified the movement further to a gesture that captured the essence of the movement and still held the energy, power and meaning. This was our “power move”- a gesture that carried the essence of our experience, of the answer to our question. We repeated our power moves several times individually and in groups. I felt calm and centred when I did my power move. My power move was a gesture that represented what it felt like in my body to be centred and be able to connect with others from this place in my centre. Whenever I repeated my power move, the gesture triggered my memory of the experience and it evoked this same sense of centeredness and stillness within my mind and body

Part 2:

After lunch, we began by reflecting on the morning and in groups of three we shared personal insights and lessons from the morning. One at a time we “dropped words in a pond”, offering words and phrases and pausing as if to watch the ripples unfurl. Sara then asked us to come to a consensus as a group on a question we had about the morning. Each member of the triad then joined 1 of 3 large groups. We shared our questions in the larger group and were directed to come to a consensus on a single question that combined them all. This seemed quite impossible for my group - there was such a wide range of questions! As we tried to find a common thread with very little success we suddenly realised we had run out of time! What we were unable to find verbally we discovered through movement as we were invited to spontaneously express in movement the group process of how we came to a consensus. Somehow, as we took this into movement, we came to a single question. Through movement and sound, each group shared how they arrived at a common group question. There was a richness to this exchange - we were all a part of this end result. We each contributed in some way and worked together to create 3 powerful questions that resonated within us as a group and reflected how we felt.

“What is the red herring in the pool of wisdom?”

“Who am I now...and now....and now...?”

“What?”

Once again we were invited to spontaneously explore these questions in movement and sound.



We were soon moving across the floor, calling out questions, meeting each other with questions, answering questions with questions. The group dynamic was soon electric as we embodied our questions...owned our questions as a group and went beyond them. Sara joined us as we travelled

deeper into this exploration and completely let go of self-consciousness and entered a state of play. I will always remember meeting Sara and in answer to her gentle but insistent “Who am I now....and now....and now?” hearing a voice arise from deep within me repeatedly pronouncing in a strong voice “I am the pool of wisdom!..... I am the pool of wisdom!” As I write this now and remember the moment it brings a smile to my face.



Entering into a state of play

“I am the pool of wisdom!” - I take a deep breath and my body remembers how it felt in my being in that moment. I was fully present and alive, attuned to my inner self, in my centre and connected to the group. Mary Starks Whitehouse talks about “to be moved” rather than “to move” - “I am moved”...It is a moment when the ego gives up control, stops choosing, stops exerting demands, allowing the Self to take over moving the physical body as it will.” (Whitehouse, 1958, pg. 243) I was consciously aware not only of being moved but also of the heightened sensitivity and awareness that came along with this altered state of consciousness. There was a conviction in my voice that came from an unknown source - I was surprised by my own words and actions! For the rest of the workshop I felt quite energised and yet paradoxically calm and still within as I took on the role of witness to each moment. This was a very profound experience and as I continue to reflect and integrate it I am very grateful to Sara for the skill of her facilitation and the ability to create and hold the space in which to explore the depths of the unconscious to bring back pearls of wisdom.

The Elements - A System of Knowing

In the last part of the workshop, Sara talked about how she used LIFEdance in a corporate setting. Sara also explained and demonstrated how the elements could be used as a language and system of knowing as well as a diagnostic tool.

Some of the differences in how Sara facilitates LIFEdance in a corporate environment include:-

- Provides more structure
- Usually in a residential setting
- Uses clear and simple assisted imagery for each element
- Working in partners to assist participants to experience the energy of the element. For example one partner imagines s/he is a mountain while the other pushes against him/her to encourage the sense of being rooted in the ground like earth.



Developing a sense of being

By applying the elements to a given situation and asking the question “what is missing?”, we can then access and embody the element that is needed. It was fascinating to watch Sara demonstrate this with one of the participants. Sara was completely transparent with her ‘client’ and seamlessly took the issue into movement. Once her client was able to identify what was missing, Sara even enlisted the help of the group to model and vocalise the “get up and go” energy of fire that seemed to be what was lacking in this particular situation. Some notes on the process:-

- The elements provide a structure to give form to the subtle forces that exist within.

- Perspective - which element does the client relate to more/less; makes them comfortable/uncomfortable? This makes it easier to identify what is missing and allows the client to experience what is missing experientially and relate this to the issue.
- Using the elements as a way of knowing and acknowledging the self brings into focus inherent strengths and resources.
- Working with polarities - there are opposites in each of the elements that bring the polarities into play with each other. For example, the stillness of a pond versus the pounding of a waterfall - it is possible to experience and express both ends of this spectrum. And to acknowledge that one does not have to experience only one or the other. – one can be both at the same time.

End Note:

It was an honour and privilege to attend and participate in this workshop and be a part of this group - the LIFEdance community!



Sara Boas lives and breathes the philosophy of LIFEdance! She effortlessly embodies the qualities of all the elements as an individual and in the style and flow of the workshop. My experience of the workshop and of Sara herself as a person was that they were fluid and yet grounded, seamlessly balancing structure with the freedom for creative exploration and spontaneity. We were guided into an exploration of different parts of ourselves and states of consciousness using the symbolism of the elements and a range of rhythms and imagery to travel beyond the ego and access deep inner resources. Sara's verbal cues were clear, precise and perfectly timed and in tune with the group as she effortlessly mirrored us and held the space. The attention to detail, Sara's presence and ability to attend not only to the group but also to each individual within the group, were inspiring.

I learnt a lot both personally as well as professionally and continue to integrate the insights and 'aha' moments from the workshop. At the very beginning of the workshop, when Sara asked us to think about a question we might have about our professional lives, I saw an image of a road leading up a hill with a tree by the side of the road. I had a strong sense of not knowing what lay ahead as the road rose up and then fell away and I could not see anything beyond a certain point. At the end of the workshop, the image still remained but I found my attitude towards it had changed completely. I realised that I didn't need to know what was beyond the crest. I could see and appreciate what was right in front of me and around me, in this moment in time. The unknown is no longer something that I need to be fearful or apprehensive of. Whatever is ahead of me, I am happy within myself and put no expectations on what the future has in store for me.

Bibliography:

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