

Reflections: Workshops presented by Penelope Best

The DTAA was pleased to welcome back Penny Best from the UK in March 2006. Penny, now a frequent visitor to Australia, conducted a five day Professional Development Event. She has become well known to our dance–movement therapy community and this time offered an excellent and stimulating three day event ‘Reflecting, Shifting & Transforming - in – Relation’ and two separate workshops on “Reflected Images: The Supervisor revealed through the Therapist who is revealed Through the Client’. We are very pleased to have received several contributions for publication. Sally Denning provides a reflection on the overall five day event, whilst Robyn Price reports on the 2nd day of the 3 day event and contributes a short poem from the content of the 3rd day. Elizabeth Mackenzie takes an interesting Haiku form approach to distill what she said was “a wonderful exploration of Dance-movement therapy practice and theory in the workshops”, and within this indicates that her perceptions and understanding were heightened by her attendance.

Reflections Overall

Sally Denning

Sally, B.Ed, Grad. Dip Movement & Dance, Grad. Cert Dance Therapy, M.Ed., is a DMT, professional dancer and teacher of Middle Eastern dance. She has a small private practice in DMT and specialises in working with people with depression.

It was a great pleasure to attend another series of workshops with Penny Best. As always it is a privilege to work with Penny and learn from her vast experience and knowledge of dance movement therapy.

For those who are not already aware, Penny has an extremely strong background in the field of dance movement therapy. She is a senior dance movement therapy clinician, supervisor, educator and researcher; Honorary Research Fellow within the School of Human Sciences at the University of Roehampton, London. In addition Penny is a program co-ordinator of dance and movement psychotherapy in Warsaw Poland and core tutor Dance Therapy training, Rotterdam, Netherlands. and Mentor, Creative Partnerships action research education and creativity projects UK.

With such a strong depth of experience there is always so much to learn from Penny. I was fortunate enough to attend the entire series of March workshops and found that I was totally stimulated for the entire 5 days. Here are a few of my personal reflections:

An early start Friday morning at the Cecil St Studio in North Fitzroy, provided a small group of us with the benefit of participating in a warm-up icebreaker that was movement based. Here in the light and airy studio not far from the hustle and bustle of contemporary Brunswick St we moved our way through a series of questions: How far had we come?, had we worked with Penny before?,

qualifications in dance movement therapy?, experience in dance movement therapy?, sense of self as performer and dance artist?. To these questions we moved our response, demonstrating how to use a non-verbal means to adequately respond to verbal questioning.

On this first day we focussed on attunement and adjustment of self! Particularly, I enjoyed the way Penny emphasised that everything we do has an effect on what happens. Penny encouraged us to reflect on the impact and the effect of each of the activities we undertook.

At one stage we were asked to pair-up, one person to dance the other to firstly move with the dancer; and then later to block or interrupt the dancer’s movements. As the dancer being blocked or interrupted I realised much to my surprise, that rather than annoying me – I found the interruption a great catalyst for a new creative approach. What I thought was going to be an annoying experience became a refreshing way to reframe and change a movement experience. Penny encouraged us to think as dance movement therapists how interrupting might be an important tool to use in a therapy situation - for instance to allow the client to move forwards in a different way!



On day two we experimented with shifting perceptual perspectives. We actively experienced working from different positions or perspectives. For example we experienced position one - being the mover, position two - as the mover reflecting on the movement experience, position three - being in a witness position and reflecting on our role as witness and our experience of the mover.

Penny indicated that as dance movement therapists we must have a helicopter position and an eye in position 1, 2 and 3 at all times. I found this to make sense theoretically but in practice the ability to maintain an 'eye' in each of these positions, I found to be quite difficult!

Penny also encouraged us to watch our words. She indicated that words bring about assumptions and that these come from body based experiences. She used the word "energy" to illustrate an example. We can see energy in movement. One of the benefits of dance movement therapy Penny opined is that you can check interpretation of a word through movement.



On day 3 the theme was 'perceptual shifts between self and other'. This work further enhanced our learning and practice of day 2 exercises. We danced in pairs taking turns to follow and lead a movement experience. Then using a position 3 perspective enquired as to what informed our movement decisions?, why did we choose to undertake certain movements and interactions etc?. From this position of enquiry we were encouraged to reflect further on the movement experience, for example what were helpful and non helpful movements?, what created synergy and what didn't? As we progressed through the workshop I felt myself deepening my own reflective practices and considering the situation from different angles.

From there we completed a wonderful juicy and aesthetically pleasing exercise, that Penny called hot wax/cold wax. In this exercise we worked in 3s. Person one holds a shape and person 2 moulds the negative space, person 1 melts (hence hot wax) and

person 2 holds the space with person 3 moulding. For me this was a stunningly beautiful experience, being a shape, watching a shape and moulding the space was like art in motion.



The evening sessions Monday and Tuesday had a focus on supervision. These evening sessions allowed me to see in both a powerful and moving way the importance and validity of the supervision experience.

We danced, discussed and debated, roles, values, goals and measures of success. A surprising element was when Penny asked us to speak and move from our client's voice - in this experience we embodied our clients experience and learnt more about our client by putting ourselves "in our clients shoes". I found this experience surprisingly disturbing and powerfully moving - through embodying my perception of my client, I believe I gained understanding and insight from a different perspective.



Thank you Penny for the experience!

Opposites Together

Joy and anguish,
reaching or holding,
open yet surrounded,
in balance.

Supported.

Counter-tension, pushing and pulling, demands
from within and without,
Surprised, proud.

An open connection,
connected together,
in search of,
finding
acceptance.

Robyn Price



On Consciousness and Relationship

Robyn Price

Robyn, BA, Grad Dip Movt & Dance (Melb Uni), Grad Cert Dance Ed (UTS), is studying for a Postgraduate Diploma in DMT at Wesley Institute. She has a long standing involvement in dance, as student, teacher and performer, and works part-time as a marketing writer. The above poem was formed from her experiences on the 3rd day and below, from her reflections of Day 2.

The second day of the three day 'Reflecting, Shifting and Transforming-in-Relation' workshop with Penny Best brought into question the level of consciousness of the self, other and self with other

as we relate to clients within the therapeutic relationship.

Penny's warm-up brought us into the room, one body half at a time: a time to notice the sensations, function and influence of upper and lower body. Joining the two halves. How? The spine was my influence, connecting upper and lower, allowing energy to flow back and forth. I smiled to myself and noted that practice of the Bartenieff Fundamentals has helped build that connection and that it has remained in my body.

Shift the focus, from within to another. Take in an aspect of the other's movement, receive it, and notice what happens to it. Move the focus back to the self. Switch back and forth. What do you have to do to shift from self to other? Does it confuse, irritate or enliven? This was a warm-up that demanded involvement of both body and mind, an intense level of concentration and commitment and a focus on the here-and-now. On reflection, this is what we need to be able to do in relationship any relationship. Forget therapy for a moment. How conscious am I of how I relate to my husband, my children, my friends?

The next part of the day centred on practising the experience of first, second and third person. As a therapist, we are switching between these positions constantly and it is a skill that requires practice. Are we meeting, following or leading the client? Are we conscious of what is transpiring within ourselves? What do we bring to the relationship and how are we influencing the client by who we are in that moment?



In trios, we assumed roles. A mover was joined by a 'therapist' and observed by a witness. Following from Day 1, where we played with shape flow and

tension flow, the therapist was asked to 'meet' the mover. In my trio, each therapist met their mover in a different way. I am a visual person so my entry point is what I see, the shapes, and that is what I first look to reflect. This brought up a question for me. Is this simply because of who I am, or is it a skill I have developed through working with children and people with disabilities? Is it from lack of experience in reading tension flow? Perhaps both. As I worked in the 'therapist' role, I found I couldn't match the mover's shapes. I turned to the tension flow and in this instance, felt more able to be in relationship.



Our small group discussed how certain populations may take offence to seeing the shape of their movement reflected in the therapist's body. On the other hand, I work with a nine-year old developmentally delayed boy who loves it when our shapes match.

This exercise highlighted our individual differences and with that, the range of dance/movement therapy experiences that we as a group are capable of offering. However, it also highlighted the importance of knowing ourselves and our own patterns, and acknowledging that each client brings a new possibility for connection that we need to find before we can begin to work.

In a short exercise before lunch, one person closed their eyes while a partner led them around the room, near and past other pairs but not touching. The task required awareness of both partner and the group. After stopping, the leaders moved quietly away to find a new partner. This person had no idea of who was leading them and needed to adapt to the new

person through their senses of touch, smell and hearing. After swapping, the task was intensified. One person lead two with eyes closed, one with each hand. The sorts of skills required to lead others in that way, to negotiate the other people in the room, reflects the kinds of skills required to lead groups, where you cannot pay total attention to each person in the room at any time. Penny discussed how it is possible to match shape flow or tension flow in one part of the body while attending to others.

In the afternoon, Penny presented us with a set of rules. Movers lined the walls in a 'U' shape and were given the instruction to only travel along a straight line from their starting place to the other side of the room. Boundaries were part of the imposed structure. We were allowed to be creative, to engage and connect with others whenever it happened, or choose not to. We could return to our wall at any time but we must remain on our own pathway. Music was added – another imposition, motivation perhaps.

Afterwards we drew in response to the moving before discussing the experience with a partner. I had so many insights along the way and on reflection, about the choices I made, what I wanted to happen and what did occur, what I enjoyed, what I noticed and what surprised me.

With a simple structure came safety, simplicity, no chance of failure. For me, there was room to reflect and time for themes to emerge. Enough structure to know what was required yet enough room to explore.



One of the over-riding themes of the three-day workshop was relationship. Here was a task that allowed participants to experiment with the concept of relationship, after a number of earlier tasks in the day that started with the relationship between upper and lower body, that encouraged awareness of self

and self with other and then self with other in relationship to many others.



To end the day, participants were asked to consider three important cultural influences in their lives, to develop a movement phrase for each, to refine and clarify and to join them together into a phrase. Back in a circle, we were asked to perform our phrase, stating the cultures. The purpose? Self-awareness.

Reflecting, shifting and transforming-in-relation

Elizabeth Mackenzie

Elizabeth offers in Haiku form, a distillation of what she described as a “wonderful exploration of Dance-movement therapy practice and theory in the Penny Best workshops, whose purpose and effect was to heighten and change our perceptions and our understanding”.

Filling, hollowing
In flow of body shape change;
Warm-up: Building trust

(Or flow of tensions
In **empathic** attunement;
Mutual rhythms)

**I move, noticing;
Affected also by you
And all each brings with us!**

Gentle transitions:
Awareness progresses
from self to other

**Transitions give space,
distance for relationship;
bodies reshaping**

Time to respond:
In symmetry of dimensions,
my being with you

What are our influences and what do we bring to the therapy space?

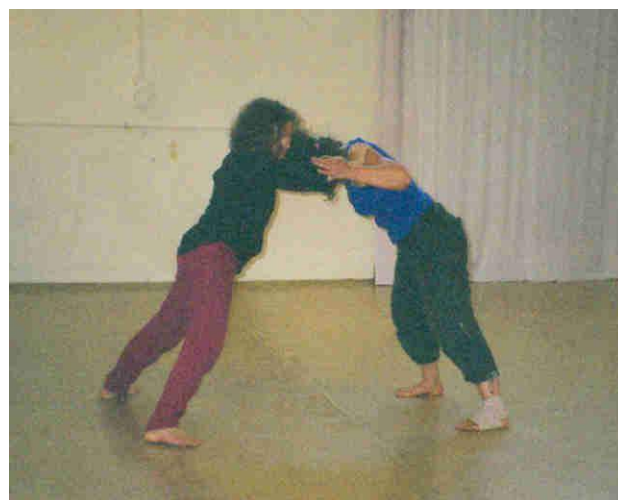
My choices reflected something about myself in relationship to others and brought up questions, more questions.

I couldn't help thinking, as we worked throughout this very hot day, of a moment in a group therapy class two years ago. After a demonstration of a session, my lecturer asked if I knew why I was where I was at various times. His point was that the therapist influences what is happening with clients and between clients (in a group) and that we need to be clear on our purpose at all times. Sometimes it may be appropriate to move with clients, sometimes it may be important to step back and be the unmoving witness. No matter our choices, though, Penny Best's point is that through our breath, our body shape, our use of space and our cultural and interpersonal experiences, we bring something unique into the therapeutic space. And we have a professional responsibility to be aware of what that is as we work.

**Reflecting on actions;
What did I do, how and why?
What may show me change?**

Could I intervene,
perturbing the usual?
...Possibilities!

**Beyond boundaries,
freedom and strength in risking,
in this dance, I am.**



Elizabeth, TPTC (Rudolf Steiner), TTLC (teacher librarian), Dip. DMT, Grad. Dip. Movement and Dance, works with mothers and babies and as a Diversional Therapist engaging a group of males - most of whom suffer from schizophrenia - in movement and other creative arts activities. Elizabeth also teaches Yoga.