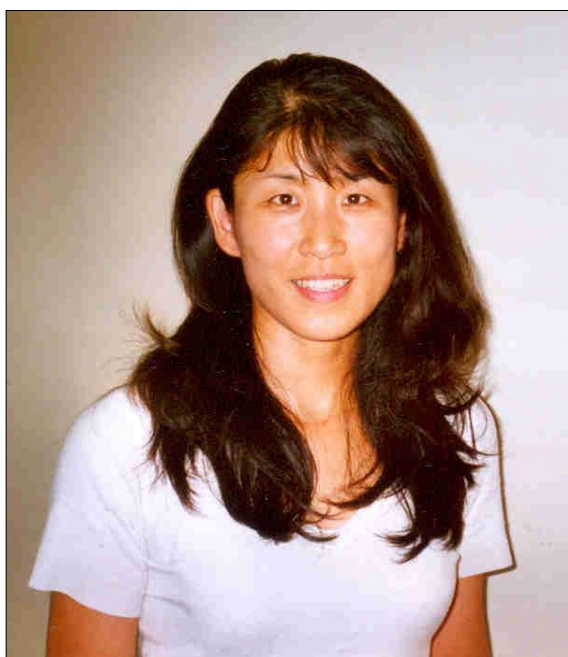


Reflection on My Dance Therapy Journey

Yumi Schaefer



Yumi Schaefer, a Japanese-born Korean is now a permanent Australian resident. She has a graduate diploma in Dance Therapy from Wesley Institute in Sydney. During her training, she accomplished two major projects: one with an elderly population and the other with people of Asian cultural backgrounds in Australia. She has worked as a Dance-Movement Therapist for the last 5 years with a wide range of client groups. She also lectures at Wesley on a course on Disability and Dance Therapy. She founded and directed the Sydney Dance Therapy Forum which started in November 2004 and has recently received the recognition of Professional Membership of the DTAA.

Yumi also has an extensive background in multiculturalism and the issues faced by Korean communities resident overseas. She completed a BA at Long Island University in New York with a social science degree that focused on minority issues and multicultural understanding. She is also a qualified Pilates and Fitness instructor with a passion for promoting people's wellness through bodywork. She is presently establishing a Life Wellness Practice. See: www.wellnessnetwork.com.au

On a crisply cold winter day in the Southern Hemisphere, I arrived in Sydney from hot Japan on July 12, 1998. My intention was to study Dance Therapy at the Wesley Institute for the graduate diploma course without knowing what it really involved. (Honestly, I just wanted to dance for healing and freedom. The course was of course not just that! It was a serious study and training for a serious degree!) At that time I was quite vulnerable,

having suffered burnout from my ten-year involvement in human-rights movement for Koreans in Japan. I was still physically and emotionally very weak. I knew dance and movement was a way of freedom, release and healing for me. I remember, in an initial intensive course on psychotherapy, the lecturer said, "If you want to become a therapist, you need therapy first." This was a very pertinent comment to me at that time. During my two years' studies at Wesley; through my own healing journey (for body, mind and spirit), I came to grasp the power of Dance Therapy. The ethos I've worked under for all these years is derived from my initial powerful experience of dance therapy. "As You Move, You Discover the Power in You," – stated on the front of my brochure.

I have worked from the belief that moving our bodies in creative and expressive ways in a non-threatening and safe environment brings about healing and empowerment within. I enjoy seeing the emotional and physical freedom my work brings to all types of people.

After five years of professional work as a dance-movement therapist and receiving my Professional Membership of the DTAA, it feels that I have reached the first major milestone of my practice. On reflection, I am absolutely certain that dance therapy is my lifestyle and lifetime career. I gain such satisfaction and joy from my work - moving and dancing with my clients; young, old; able, disabled; males, females; English speakers, non-English speakers.

The 'Riverland Revellers'



The following are some of the highlights in my work:

- **At a Multi-cultural Women's Group Workshop:** *Some ladies from certain ethnic backgrounds shared their singing and dancing with the group, saying this is their first time to share their cultural heritage with others in such a positive way. We took turns to 'show off' our own cultural dance and heritage in our own free way. This experience was painfully healing and empowering for me as well. Self-affirmation of one's ethnic background needs a secure sense of the self before coping with the environment well.*
- **At a Nursing Home:** *During a free dancing time with music, which involved some physical touch such as holding hands, a very frail looking gentleman said, "Thank you so much for your caring and warm touch. This is wonderful." Touch is a human communication and connection, and stimulates life energy. It releases psycho-physical tensions and sense of isolation - undoubtedly vital for this population. This gentleman passed away two weeks later. I felt we achieved something significant before his time to go came.*
- **In the case of a young male client (age 23) with autism,** *after working for nearly one and a half years: In the program, we focused on developmental re-patterning and integration of movement and verbalization along with lots of dance and music playing. He normally uttered a word at a time with limited vocabulary: eg., "Train" repeatedly when he saw a train. Our room was facing a railway track with trains going back and forth. I guided him to move and verbalize a sentence with a moving train. One day, he verbalized a full sentence in a beautifully flowing manner, "Train is going to Bankstown." and "Train is going to the city." depending which direction the train was running. When this happened, it made my day! (I almost jumped out of my chair.) His parents and coordinator were very impressed too. This showed that a proper amount of exercise and body movement with verbalization vitalizes and awakens the brain function. Human-capacity is limitless. I am always thrilled to see my clients' new ability be given birth through DMT.*
- **At a Mental Health Forum workshop:** *As a warm-up, we walked around the room. The room was packed with participants. Most of the participants (with mental health issues) were walking, looking down. I guided them to walk in a different posture. Such as taking our head up and high. This simple and quite familiar instruction for us, somatic practitioners, turned out to be such a new and refreshing experience for many of the participants. The comments I received were, "Wow, I feel different." "I am in a different mood, happy." The class atmosphere had a shift. "...Thus, it effects changes in feelings, cognition, physical functioning and behaviour." (ADTA – promotional material)*
- **With a ladies' group with sensory disabilities:** *I have named the class, "Well-being and Movement."*

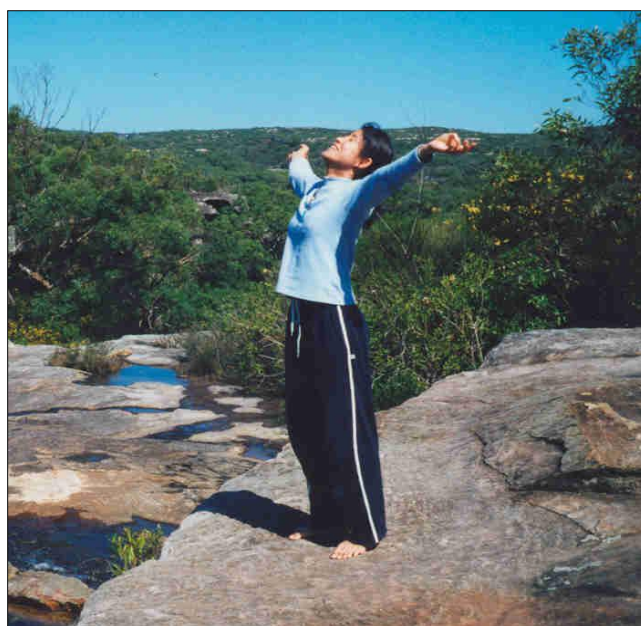
I combine the elements of dance therapy, Pilates and visual arts along with a discussion and information sharing for health and wellness topics. It has been an interactive and life-enhancing experience for the group. I am thinking of expanding "Well-being and Movement" classes with this concept of combining my various trainings and qualifications. This is currently an exciting process.

These are just some of what I have witnessed and experienced through my work. Dance-Movement Therapy offers infinite possibilities and potential to many individuals. We both - therapist and clients - grow in the relationship that takes place in sessions. I am committed to my own further professional development and to working with the notion that personal growth is facilitated by creative expression.

I don't know how my next five years will unfold as a dance-movement therapist. One thing for sure is that I will be dancing with my little baby, who will change my world for ever - I am due to give birth in April.

One wish I have for my future dance therapy practice is to run sessions and workshops outdoors - in the natural environment of this beautiful Australia I now call 'home.' Also, to start a "Dance and Move with your baby" class for both pregnant women and mothers!

Finally, I would so much like to keep building up the DMT community network in the Sydney area. Let me know if you would like to help out the Sydney Dance Therapy Forum, which is scheduled to be held twice a year, in April and November, while I take baby-care leave. Also let me know if you would like to be involved in it as a participant.



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