

Helen Payne's Workshop on "Authentic Movement"

Held 19-21 January 2007 - Coppin Hall, Melbourne

Review

by Sally Denning and Rob Baum



Dr Helen Payne, (pictured right with Elizabeth Loughlin in Melbourne), M. Phil, PhD UKCP, SRDMT and Fellow ADMT, UK was previously Head of Counselling and Psychotherapy at the University of Hertfordshire, England where she is now a Reader. She pioneered the development of DMT in the UK co-creating the professional association (ADMT, UK) for which she was Chair for five years, designing and

leading the first nationally validated UK postgraduate training, writing and researching. Helen trained in person-centred, psychodynamic and group analytic approaches and studied authentic movement for many years with Janet Adler. She educates counselors, supervises doctoral candidates, researches and teaches authentic movement and dance movement therapy worldwide, together with having a private practice in integrative movement psychotherapy. Recently she inspired the co-creation of the new international journal 'Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy'. (Source: pg xii Dance Movement Therapy Theory, Research and Practice 2nd Edition edited by Helen Payne)

I See a Mover ...!

Sally Denning

Helen started the three day workshop in Authentic Movement with very clear and specific ground rules for Authentic Movement. She explained that it is the Facilitator's role to prepare participants for the Authentic Movement group as with any other group, by negotiating, clarifying and maintaining the ground rules. By the end of day 3 we were all able to articulate the 10 ground rules from memory:

- Safety (do not leave the room during an Authentic Movement session)
- Take care of self: for example remove all dangling jewelry
- Take care of own body and mention any special needs
- The Group is confidential: what is mentioned in the session stays in the session
- This Authentic Movement session is a training session and a therapeutic process, and not a therapy group
- Take anything to a therapist or dyad to deepen the experience
- Helen Payne is in supervision and may take parts of

this session to her supervisor however, the session itself is confidential and no names will be mentioned

- Be non-judgmental: use the workshop to deepen respect for others
- There may be physical contact in the workshop but it will be normal and natural, non-sexual and non violent
- When doing Authentic Movement the eyes should be closed, but need to be ½ open if moving quickly and strongly

Helen commented that her work and style is heavily influenced by that of Carl Rogers – a key proponent of person centred therapy. She explained that as a result, she sees the focus of dance movement therapy as deepening the unconscious process. She indicated that without therapist empathy (or unconditional positive regard for the client) there is no therapeutic change. This therapist empathy became a key theme for our work in Authentic Movement across the 3 days.

Helen explained that Authentic Movement is essentially a discipline which can be used to promote emotional wellbeing and health. She described it as a powerful tool to develop and increase personal wellbeing. Essentially, Authentic Movement uses a unique form of free association in movement to bring mindfulness – a kind of kinetic meditation (or in other words, contemplation of our internal world through movement of the body).



Sally Denning, (left) with Mary Rose Nicol, Velvet Eldred and Suzie Kuzmanovski



We commenced the 3 day workshop with a series of warm-up exercises to familiarize us with the different roles.

For example:

1. The mover dances and the witness describes, under their breath, the movements they see.
2. The mover dances and describes their own movement out aloud. The witness observes.
3. The mover sits still with eyes closed. The witness witnesses.
4. Discussion of the three experiences.

The theory is that the more we move and are witnessed the better clarity we will have about our self. Helen identified the experience as one in common with mindfulness i.e. mover is developing mindfulness and expressing it whereas the witness is developing mindfulness and containing it.

Helen explained that Authentic Movement group participants may participate in one of two distinct roles:

- The Mover
- The Witness

The Mover:

A person moving with eyes closed in the presence of another, the witness, is termed the mover. According to Helen, the mover responds to their inner experience and moves accordingly. It is as if they listen with an inner ear until a movement arises at a deep cellular level.

At the conclusion of the movement experience, movers are invited to speak, particularly about any significant moment during it. The process appears to be strongly directed by the mover and it is their choice as to whether they wish to hear from a witness.

The Witness:

The role of the witness is to sit at the edge of the movement space and consciously attend, with eyes open, to the mover. The witness does not move and is not a watcher or an observer of the mover but is an empathic conscious and receptive participant. The witness acts in the role of container for the mover's embodied immersion in the unconscious.

The witness speaks only after the mover has spoken and only if requested by the mover. The witness of Authentic Movement has a special role. The aim is to be fully present so therefore moving or note taking by the witness is not encouraged.

Sometimes the mover may request a silent witness. A silent witness is fully present and holding the space at all times and may listen to what the mover has to say but will not comment on the movement experience at all.

Beatrice Lucas, Alice Owen and Virginia Woods, came from sunny Queensland.

The sequence Authentic Movement usually follows is:

- Mover makes eye contact with the witness prior to closing eyes and commencing the experience
- Movement experience is witnessed by a witness
- Mover makes eye contact with the witness at the conclusion of the experience
- Transition time – time for both mover and witness to come out of the experience and perhaps sit, draw, reflect or journal
- Mover speaks about their experience
- Witness is invited to speak or to remain silent – this is the mover's choice. If the witness speaks it can only be about what the mover has already mentioned.

The mover speaks first and describes the movement experience. The mover should give cues when speaking such as the place of movement, the time of the movement such as at the beginning, or in the middle of the movement sequence or towards the end. The mover should describe the quality of the movement experience spoken about and uses present tense language such as:

- "I am the mover that"



Attendees in the break: From left to right: Naomi Audette, Fran Ostroburski, Elizabeth Mackenzie and Bouthaina Mayall.

My personal reflections of being the mover within the Authentic Movement experience was like a moving dream - a bridge that transferred me from conscious to unconscious. The movement experience felt like moving at a deep pre-verbal level where the movement was not initiated with my conscious brain but instead at a deep cellular level.

The following is an extract from my journal reflection of the Authentic Movement experience as a mover.

“... I feel my arms raise and experience a sense of balance and connection with the elements, the sky and earth.

I felt like a cloud floating above the earth.

My arms spread open - as a mover, my arms fly behind me and I experience the sense of being a bird in flight. I am the one at the front of a V formation. I feel exhilarated but then I get tired and drop back.

I drop down and down sinking with weight in my knees.

I fall to the sand – and then become the sand. I am the sand and it is windy. I roll and roll blowing with the wind. Sometimes I lift up and other times down. The sand rolls into the rhythm of the sea. I wash backwards and forwards as a wave over a rock.

I become the green seaweed bending forwards and back – the tide goes out and I dry-up and crack....”

If the witness is invited to speak, they only speak about the movements that the mover has spoken about. There is a theory that the mover will only remember what they are ready to remember, so for this reason it is important that the witness does not discuss movement experience that have not already been mentioned by the mover.

Throughout the Authentic Movement experience the language is in present tense for example:

- I see a mover....
- My body experience as a witness...
- My interpretation or story of the movement experience is ...
- My feelings and judgments arising from the movement experience are ...

If there is a silent witness, then this person witnesses the mover's movement experience subjectively and absolutely does not speak. Silent witnesses make eye contact with the mover and also if another witness is present – makes eye contact with the other witness.

I found the experience of the silent witness resonated very strongly with me – there is something very pure about witnessing and holding the space without cluttering it with spoken observations – below is one of my journal reflections of this unspoken witnessing:

“... I see a strong and powerful mover – a mover with a deep and spiritual awareness. The mover uses breath to support her drop to deeper and deeper levels. Martial arts like movements bending deep with arms completing wide circles. The breath remains strong deep and resonant throughout the experience. I hear a low growling sound, rhythmically different to the breath – the mover is squatting and I am surprised to notice the growl is coming from the mover – I wonder how this can be!

I feel honoured to be the silent witness....”

On Day 3 we experienced the ‘Long Circle’. It is given this name because it can be set for a long period of time – for example 4 hours.

In the ‘Long Circle’ people move in and out. Prior to starting the circle decide what the minimum number of witnesses should be. For example, in a room of 25 people it may be decided that, as a minimum, there must always be at least 10 witnesses. The number is up to the Group.

The Long Circle is a very organic process. The participants decide if they want to move or witness and can do both if wanted, several times in the period of the Long Circle.

Following the movement experience, there is a short transition time and then participants are invited to speak in chronological order in relation to when they moved. Again you use the language “... I am the mover who (and then you describe your movement experience). At this point you indicate whether you would like witnessing of this movement and if so anybody who witnessed this experience may speak.

Once again as a witness you must own your experience and your own story in witnessing. It is important not to project or interpret the mover.

My reflection of the ‘Long Circle’ follows:

“... I am the silent witness in the long circle. I witness, then I move and then I witness again.

I enjoy moving. I feel so peaceful and energised. I feel that I have rediscovered dormant parts of myself.... I return to the long circle and enjoy the collective energy I am given from the other witnesses....”

This 3 day workshop was extremely worthwhile and I found Dr Helen Payne to be an informed and interesting facilitator. A very interesting and enjoyable experience.

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