

The Context of Dance and Dance Movement Therapy in Brazil

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Teresa Pacchiega is a Registered Dance Movement Therapist (Roehampton University, UK) and clinical psychologist in Brazil. She has worked with special needs and autism populations for over 10 years and elderly clients with dementia. Teresa is a guest lecturer at universities in the states of Bahia, Santa Catarina and Rio de Janeiro.

Brazil is famous for its carnival and football. Both events are strong cultural activities that change the daily dynamic of its population. During the carnival and in many other social events, everyone dances to the same tune, making the social differences amongst economic classes disappear. Regarding football “ginga”, an expression meaning fluidity and flexibility - which resembles a dance, makes all the difference and success to the Brazilian performance.

Dance has always been part of Brazilian culture even before colonization by the Portuguese in the year 1500. The Indians used to dance when preparing for war, celebrating birth, to bring rain, and for many other rituals with traditions which are kept nowadays by the existing tribes.

Over the last decade, dance has been part of a pioneer project at a few public schools destined for the low economic class. The students that benefited from this programme describe their gains as being self-esteem, dedication, expression - using the whole body, responsibility and respect. The original project is expanding and benefiting more students all over the country. In a similar way, for the last few years, dance has also been introduced to specific groups such as special needs, young people who have committed offenses and in programmes designed for the elderly population. The gains for these groups include a sense of inclusion, achievement, self-value and self-respect.

More and more people are realising that the benefits of dance are countless, from physical wellbeing to emotional and psychological support. Nowadays, in Brazil, dance has started to shift from the formal style taught at dance schools to become a useful therapeutic and educational tool at mainstream schools, recreational programmes, rehabilitation centres and so forth.

In the same way as it was with the American pioneers, Dance Movement Therapy as a

psychotherapeutic intervention, is virtually unknown to most of the Brazilian population.

The historical and cross-cultural effort of many professionals to validate it as a science and the range of literature in this field has not yet rung in the ears of the professional bodies.

Dance Therapy here in Brazil takes varied shapes according to the background and understanding of the professionals on this practice. It may include physiotherapy exercises, Biodanza, Bioenergetics, massage, chakra alignment, a variety of different styles of dance, choreographic sequences or relaxation. The meaning and purpose of these practices are sometimes considerably divergent.

An approach which is expanding and becoming very popular amongst Brazilians is the method developed by Maria Fux, an Argentinean dancer and choreographer. She has been working for several decades and her work is also known in other countries such as Italy, Spain and Israel. Her approach to dance is as an artist and educator but Maria Fux also places emphasis on the therapeutic benefits of dance such as decreasing isolation, stimulating creativity and encouraging personal potential.



With such diversity it is common to face confusion and misunderstanding of this practice. Up to now Dance Therapy has been excluded from being considered as a form of treatment for any kind of psychotherapeutic approach. Alongside other types of creative arts, as tools of intervention, dance is part of the resources considered by some Art Therapy

courses, which also vary considerably in their programmes, aims and applicability.

Dance Movement Therapy is a profession still to be developed in Brazil. As dance is an important part of the lives of the Brazilian people, and is gaining acceptance as an educational and therapeutic resource, it seems likely that there exists a potential for Dance Movement Therapy to develop. It is important, though, that its concepts, ideas and historical perspectives are understood and clarified in such a way that professionals, as well as the general population, can distinguish and make choices from the various propositions of these practices.



A few articles have been published introducing Dance Movement Therapy to various members of the public and some isolated expressions of interest have started to arise. To cope with the differentiation between the various propositions within Dance Therapy, I found it useful to call it by a different name. Movement Psychotherapy is the title being used over the articles and brochures that I am using to promote the field. The development of this practice has to be slow; since my research shows that there are only two known, accredited professionals of the field and another two students who are completing their training course at an accredited training institute abroad. Dance Movement Therapy has just been born here and still has a long way to grow in the immensity of diversity which is Brazil.

Addendum:

Due to the economic crisis in Brazil there are no formal jobs offered here and I have not managed to establish a proper continuum of work.

I have traveled and visited many places (day centers, educational settings, therapeutic sources) for people with autism and special needs and despite their interest in my work there is no funding to hire a professional or to start a project. All I've managed

was volunteering for short period of time (otherwise I would work continuously without honorary) offering groups within this population.

The unemployment rates are high, considering only those searching for jobs. There are many candidates for every position available. It is an alarming situation and one that explains the need for events where people can forget about it and for that dance has a strong cathartic power.

At the moment I am working on preparing a material for a module I am teaching in a post grad course of special needs education. The module is entitled as "Movement as part of communication and development of the person with special needs". I have also given workshops on this theme as well as on the general understanding of the autism spectrum.

The further information in this addendum is from an email from Teresa and printed with her permission. We are full of admiration for her endeavours and total dedication to her work.

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Photographs: Moving without age boundaries.

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