

Reflections on a Trip to East Timor

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I had been looking for an opportunity to visit East Timor for a few years now. It lies just over the ditch and shares interesting botanical similarities to Darwin, my home. Furthermore, it is a nation at a fascinating stage of political development. I always like to travel with a purpose, so Kim's invitation for assistants in her piloting of dance-movement therapy techniques in Timor-Leste caught my eye immediately. This trip was a fantastic opportunity, not only to visit and learn a bit about what's going on in East Timor, but also to work as part of a team of dance therapists, planning, facilitating, living and learning together. What a novelty for me as the only dance therapist in the Northern Territory!

I found it very affirming to experience the consistency in our ideas and techniques. This was particularly apparent as the majority of our workshops were co-facilitated, and offered at an introductory level. Building on a recent two-day introductory workshop co-facilitated by Kim and myself in Darwin (en route to Timor-Leste), teaching and working in this way has served to ground and re-orient me in my wider dance therapy work, reminding and bringing me back to the powerful fundamentals.

For me, this trip has extended my current interest and experience in working cross culturally, and with people who have experienced torture and trauma. I currently work full time as a counsellor with refugee and asylum seeker children and their families in Darwin. In February this year I was also privileged to visit Umphiem Refugee camp on the

Thai Burma border, and Krama Yoga Studio in Pnomh Penh, Cambodia, where I ran a series of dance-movement therapy workshops addressing trauma and the body. While our workshops in Timor did not specifically address trauma, participants' responses and comments were very positive and acknowledged the potential for this sort of work for healing and development of greater health, wellbeing not only of individuals, but also local communities.

Overall, like my other experiences in working cross-culturally, it seemed that dance-movement therapy perhaps made more intuitive sense to the groups we worked with in East Timor than it does for most mainstream Australians. East Timorese people, like people in other developing nations, are also more naturally living daily in their bodies, as opposed to behind digital screens. These are ideas we will explore further in our research and development of a more considered article on the role of our work here.

Much more than gaining 30 hours of supervised practice towards my Professional Member registration, I am excited about the great potential for further work for dance therapists in East Timor. All of the groups we worked with were interested in further learning and development of these ideas. Several returned the next day already having trialled some of our activities with their families and communities. How wonderful it would be to continue to explore more deeply the application of this work and its potential contribution to ongoing healing and development in East Timor.



Conversely I also found it stimulating to share new ideas with other team members who brought a range skills, experience and interests from diverse fields; Meredith with her background in process work and conflict resolution, Kim with her vast experience in facilitation and cultural community development, and Erika Goldsmith (dance student) for her fresher eyes and general sensitivity.



Finally, I have felt greatly inspired by my colleagues; Kim for her incredible work ethic and passion for this work, as well as her wider cultural community development work (through Many

Hands International), and Meredith for her depth of intelligence, enquiry and reflection into all of our work and Erika

Goldsmith (dance student) for her fresher eyes and general sensitivity. As stated by Meredith, it feels greatly supportive and motivating to have developed a working peer relationship with two other dance therapists. With such a great range of beneficial outcomes, I highly recommend to anyone in our profession consideration and creation of further similar adventures in collaboration and learning.



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