

Reflections: Birds of a Feather Two Day Summit

E. Connor Kelly



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‘Birds of a Feather’ was the thematic image containing the collaboration between various creative arts therapies organizations and training institutes at the recent ‘Summit’ held in Melbourne. The organizing committee included members from ANZATA (Australian and New Zealand Arts Therapy Association), ACATA (Australian Creative Arts Therapy Association), DTAA (Dance Therapy Association Australia) and MIECAT (Melbourne Institute Experiential Creative Arts Therapies).

Held in Fitzroy, at MIECAT on July 13 -14, 2012, the programme structure followed a MIECAT method of enquiry with the first workshops on the theme of Discovery, the second Dream and the final workshops, Design.

Nyrelle Bada (ACATA) and Kay Gravell (MIECAT), acted as hosts throughout the two day

event, and guided us throughout, with the help of their ‘singing bowl’.

Jane Guthrie (DTAA), colleague and friend, beautifully orchestrated the initial warm-up, using dance and movement, posture and gesture, to encourage us to greet each other. Then later led us into finding our own rhythms, sharing them with others, and moving in and out of sharing, before creating pathways through space moving, both as ourselves, and in unison. The theme of own rhythms, then blended with others, highlighting our similarities and differences. Carla van Laar (Phoenix/ACATA) finished off the warm-up by encouraging us to create postcards of when we became aware and developed an interest in becoming creative arts therapists.



The finished postcards were displayed on the windows to create a time line. While I thoroughly enjoyed both aspects of the warm-up, I would like to have seen the processing of the movement and dance more linked to the postcard creation. But what I loved about the postcard process, was the opportunity of sharing my story with another person; how a doorway opened in my life at that moment in time.

We ‘flocked’ to the first workshops of the day, that related to the theme of Discover. I attended Sharon Paetzold (DTAA) and Lucy O’Grady’s (AMTA) workshop. The other one running at the same time was co- facilitated by Julie McDonald

(ACATA) and Joanna Jaaniste (NECATA and ANZATA). In the one I attended, Lucy taught us a lovely song about the smallest bird singing the most beautiful song. Then the leaders guided us through the room to look at four 'nests' of props and we had to decide which one we felt we belonged to. In the four small groups decided by which 'nest' we chose, we discussed how we would use our chosen props with clients, and from this each group created a performance piece to share with the larger group. My group had rich discussions about the use of the beautiful bits of fabric we chose from our 'nest', and from this we created our dance movement sequence. As we performed this, I realized how much I had missed dancing with other dance/movement therapists (who happened to be in my group – no doubt as attracted to the movement potential of the beautiful scarves as I was) and felt happiness and joy dancing with them. We ended inside the fabric, tied together which held and supported us in a circle.



babies - who eventually left the nest to fly on their own.



Each performance was witnessed by the other small groups, who responded by 'tossing out' spontaneous words from what they had seen. The words were gathered by Lucy, to be later incorporated into a song we would all write and sing together. Another Music Therapist was in the group who chose the instrument 'nest' and with her guitar, the addition of voice and movement, the group created gorgeous layers of rhythms and relationship.

The art group, who chose the art 'nest', put their art work creations around them - and for their performance shared one piece of paper to make a group mural. We witnessed this happening in silence as it became their sacred space. It reminded me of mandala creating in India, where there are Buddhist communities that create beautiful things before they let them go. The final group in this work shop chose the 'nest' of masks and from them created a drama with archetypal figures - the theme of a mother bird feeding

The workshop ended with the song we all created from the witness's words. It was a beautifully cooled work shop, allowing us to experience the power of four creative arts therapies modalities which were then integrated through the song. We discovered individual gifts in our own special modality, whilst we experienced the gifts offered by others.

I attended a workshop lead by two Adrians (one from ANZATA and one from ACATA). We started with a team game, before moving into a drama work in chorus, or choral practices. Standing behind someone in a circle we followed the person in front of us in a group of five in a diamond shaped chorus formation. One person in the middle, one front and back and one on each side. The middle person

had to determine how close the group was, or how far apart, while the front person led the group all facing in the same direction. When the leader turned (90 degrees) - the leadership would change. Following some initial confusion, the group eventually caught on, prior to the two groups meeting. We were then encouraged to let the movement come more organically and qualities that related to our work were added, for example vulnerability. We then tried to create one large group with these differences, which made it very interesting. The creation of an art work followed, with permission to use the materials in any way we chose. I found this liberating, creating a sculpture then sharing the experience with another while walking around the 'gallery'. The workshop finished with selecting one of many black and white photos spread on the floor, picking one that represented a past triumph, a current challenge, or one that we liked or could use for personal self-care. The activity was processed in a large circle and while I appreciated the offerings, I wasn't sure how the activities were all connected?



Toril Pursell (ANZATA) and Lana Sussman Davis's (NECTA) wrap-up of the first day included a poem from Leonie Hurry (Drama Therapy Institute), and we were then divided into two groups and involved in a gift offering activity around the circle through gesture.

The second day began with San Leenstra (ANZATA) and Joanna Jaaniste (NECATA) and a people bingo game with ten categories that had us all mixing and blending to find a person to match the answers. There was much laughter in the race to complete it with a prize offered for the winner. A lovely cartoon activity followed, in groups of seven. We each created our own cartoon or stick figure in the first square of a paper folded into eight. The paper was then passed around the group so each person filled in the next blank square, adding to everyone's cartoon story. We created our own final scene when the paper was returned. I discovered beauty and pleasure in my story and was filled with the appreciation that somehow my group members understood my life. A gaze meeting activity in a large circle followed with the person who received the gaze responding by saying 'yes'; at the same as the other person had to find another place to go, by getting assent from someone else.

The final workshops included my own, (CTAA, DTAA) together with Glenda Needs (ACATA). And the other one, running at the same time, was led by Edwina Enthwistle (MIECAT) and Sheridan Linnell (UWS). Glenda and I had the theme of building bridges and began with an art process involving filling colourful containers with small gifts to offer to the profession. From this I suggested group members find a simple gesture or movement phrase to represent their gifts. They then had to find a small group of colleagues and with them come up with ideas of how they could link and create together.

The individual movements were shared with the group and new group movement pieces created from that starting point. A central wooden dance

floor section in the room acted as a perfect frame for the groups to connect, link together, and share ideas. We accentuated the frame with many properties spread out on the floor.

Within this I facilitated a variation on the physical storytelling score called 'the journey', dividing the group into two. Then dividing the space into where the score would begin, where individual movement or group would take place, and an ending place - designated as the 'unknown'. This was where their story ends at the moment and where the group could collectively create the next step. Following completion of the first group's score, the participants and witnesses spoke of their experience of being a part of it.



The second group followed the same score based on what they had seen and experienced, and it became a completely different enactment. From processing this experience, a participant spoke of her resistance to this movement form and agreed to two other people, using her resistance story in the journey score. This was a two person score,



with one person playing her - the storyteller, and the other playing her resistance. This duet allowed many of the challenges and differences to have a voice through an improvisation.

It was a privilege to work with Glenda. We felt we had created a workshop that gave participants something to take with them as they worked towards building connectedness with other creative arts therapists.

The summit was closed in a 2 hour workshop facilitated by Amanda Levey (ANZATA), Jan Allen (MIECAT) and Patricia Fenner (La Trobe University). Firstly it involved finding words to describe what we had expected when we arrived, and then words for our experiences. Sociograms were then created using polarities from the words generated. For example, level of comfort felt at the event; were expectations met and etc. Then with the group in a circle, the three leaders then shared a dialogue between them about the event; this was followed by a dialogue from three conference organizers, then three volunteers and a further triad included Warren Lett (founder of MIECAT), together with more recently qualified creative arts therapists. Warren gave almost a history lesson on how this event was too long in coming and what had led up to it, but all the dialogue was useful. I appreciated the witness circle and shared the richness of the two day event in words.



As small groups we then created origami birds from a package provided. The idea was that we could keep dialoguing during this process, but it was quite a complex task. We later 'flew' the birds to the windows to create flocks of different colours. The final activity was to provide something for the feedback box - something we could each contribute - before a brief moving inhale and exhale ending.

That evening we celebrated at the Dax Centre, an event open to all creative arts therapists and partners. A short welcome talk from a Dax employee about the centre (which has an art therapist on staff), was followed by a

'performance' and some playback theatre improvisation around welcoming all the groups involved and summarizing the Summit activities. The evening ended with lovely Bollywood dancing from Anjali Senjupta who got us all to join in.



My word to describe as I left the summit was *empowerment*. The experience clarified the depth, understanding and appreciation I hold, for my own modality, dance movement therapy, and also as a creative arts therapists. I experienced the richness of the modalities meeting together and the uniqueness and gifts of each.

One participant spoke about the fear of losing the preciousness of her modality and diluting it, but I believe that as we deepen into our own specialty we can appreciate it more and increase our skills. Resistance and struggle were certainly highlighted through the journey score in my own workshop.

Questions that arise for me include - do we offer activities for activity sake or are we trying to address deeper issues? Do we allow metaphors to arise or do we work with metaphors? Are we therapeutic or therapy? Working experientially how do we broaden our framework of relationship across modalities and between organizations? Some of us may feel on the fringe and not well understood as a profession, so how do we invest in marketing and educating others? We can have individual or organizational goals, but do we also have collective goals and vision? What are the next steps?

The organizers offered us a beautiful opportunity to meet and become familiar with each other and other creative arts therapies' approaches. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity find common ground. May we continue to create and deepen these links.

Photography: Janet McCleod