

Reflections on the 45th ADTA Conference in Brooklyn, New York

Sue Mullane



Sue, DMT, M.Ed. Melbourne Uni, Grad Dip Movt. and Dance, Grad Dip Special Education, has worked for more than 20 years in movement and dance in a wide variety of educational and health settings. In 2000 Sue completed a Masters research thesis (University of Melbourne) inquiring into the lived experience of women in a group dance therapy program, based on the series of programs she co-facilitated with staff from the South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault (SECASA), Victoria, for women survivors of sexual assault. She now works part-time as a DMT in a special developmental school in the Western suburbs of Melbourne.

When Kim Dunphy phoned me in January last year to suggest we respond to a call for papers for the ADTA September conference in New York, I was cautiously excited. The excitement was because I had always wanted to attend the annual ADTA conference but hadn't, as I felt I had to have a 'reason'; and the thought of being in New York for a while held strong appeal. The caution came from my reservation about the calibre of the work we were putting forward for consideration: would anyone overseas be interested in what we had to say?

So, after some very concentrated preparation with Kim in the lead-up to the conference, not to mention time spent on the internet searching for affordable accommodation in Brooklyn, it was very satisfying to at last find myself in the midst of 500 or so highly animated, energetic, garrulous dance-movement therapists.

The array of speakers and topics on offer over the 4 days was a veritable feast. It seemed the organisers had covered every facet of the vocation imaginable, including country or region of origin; philosophical persuasion; methodology of practice; and client population all under the banner 'Creating the Mind-Body Mosaic: Theory, Research and Practice in Dance/Movement Therapy'. It also made it nearly impossible to choose one session to attend over another. Two presentations which I attended remain seminal in my mind. The first was a half day intensive given by Patrizia Pallaro and Beate Becker, co-editors of the American Journal of Dance Therapy, on the need to write about our work.

Titled 'Moving, Sensing, Meaning and the Written Word in Print' Patrizia and Beate made a compelling argument for dmts to cultivate the habit of writing mindfully about their practice, and all the seemingly insignificant associated ideas, and to write often. Drawing on techniques described by teachers of writing and suited to beginners as well as the well-rehearsed, we were led by Patrizia and Beate through a series of exercises by which to put into words what occurs in our sessions, such that it has meaning to others (especially non-dancers). All of the sample word and writing exercises started in the body and with bodily-felt sensations. One example provided early in the session by Beate instructed us to write one word to describe our interest in attending the intensive, and to breathe this word in and breathe it out several times. Next, we were asked to find seated movement responses to this word, then to engage in a short written stream of consciousness response to what was experienced. To close, we were asked to highlight five words that 'stood out' to us from the stream of consciousness writing piece and reflect on their relationship to the initial chosen word. The point of the exercise was to help develop our 'vocabulary of sensation', to get inside the movement or felt response, rather than describe it as feeling state or emotions.

Writing was wholly acknowledged by Beate and Patrizia as a creative process. As such, it follows the same four stages of creation: preparation, incubation, illumination and evaluation. They emphasised the need to give time to the process, to allow both the writer and the piece space in which to breathe; and that the reflective moments of editing, discarding, and rewriting are central to

the experience as a whole. They also drew reference to authentic movement and the role of the witness, arguing that many of the tools required to be comfortable as a writer are associated with the capacity to self-reflect.

Whilst the seminar was geared mainly for those interested in writing a thesis, research project or theoretical paper, the tools for entering into and engaging with words as a meaningful representation of body-based experiences were made applicable to all reasons for writing. The seminar was peppered with many humorous anecdotes from the presenters' considerable writing and editing experience, and they made it seem so easy! We were warmly encouraged to consider writing as a very worthy as well as necessary way to spend some of our professional time.

The second pivotal seminar I attended was given by Jo Ann Hammond-Meiers on the collaboration between dance-movement therapy and technology. Her workshop was titled 'Dance/Movement Therapy and Educational Technology: Cross-pollinating Models using e-Learning, e-Research and e-Outreach'. Whilst it focused primarily on taking dance-movement therapy training online, it also planted the seeds for the inclusion of appropriate technologies in our practice. In terms of the broad dance/technology merger within the ADTA, Jo Ann's position was one of ultimate inevitability but with gentle persuasion as to its' application in various settings and with various client populations. She encouraged us attendees to draw strength from relationships forged in other fields with appropriate technologies, and to align ourselves with like-minded others for support, including those with the technological know-how. Much of our discussion was centred on our personal experiences with and opinions about technology, and the degree to which 'e-efforts' can expand our vision of how to evolve the profession of dance/movement therapy. The session provided much stimulating food for thought.

Being part of the ADTA conference experience gave me that intense sensation which comes from being in a heightened state of body-mind awareness for a relatively short period of time, whilst surrounded in the main by complete strangers. I loved being part of the daily 'buzz' as people congregated with purpose in the hotel foyers in the morning, yet also felt the strong need to flee outside at lunch breaks for space to breathe and reflect, as well as to find some food in a hurry as the conference was un-catered. Many other

memories fill my mind: being pressed in at the bookshop (which was excellent so worth the crush); walking endlessly along same-looking corridors and past doorways in search of the right room; rushing to get our conference materials photocopied at an all-night print shop the evening before our presentation; plucking up the courage to take the subway home with Kim very late after the Saturday evening dance, after we were rebuffed by a cab driver for staying too close to the pick-up point to take home; being very thankful that Kim knew all about setting up a data projector just prior to our presentation; and catching the occasional glimpse of Jane Guthrie or Linda Murrow going by – familiar faces in a very unfamiliar setting.

It was an honour for me to be selected to present at the conference and to represent the Australian dmt community. It was particularly enjoyable sharing the collaborative process with Kim and receiving respect, interest and encouragement from the international dmt community for our work.

The experience revealed much to me about the ADTA and the gamut of people who have responsibility for its continued growth and development. Now I can put some faces to the names I read about! And it was fabulous spending time in New York, as I always thought it would be.

Ed. Note:

Other reports and reflections on this conference were contributed by Kim Dunphy and Jane Guthrie in the previous issue of *Moving On* (Vol.9 no's 1 and 2. pp's 55-60).