

Opening a Pathway: Exploring DMT Training in Aotearoa

Anaia Treefoot



Anaia, DTAA, AThR, MA AT Clin., ADTA Associate, DTNZ Director, is a DM and Arts Therapist, based in Auckland, New Zealand. Anaia's background includes

working with children with multiple disabilities, Autism and other special needs; Women's Groups; adults seeking personal growth and self-understanding; and young children and their parents. Anaia gained her MA in Clinical Arts Therapy specializing in DMT then travelled to New York for internship with Dr Suzi Tortora. Anaia returned to NZ in 2010 and has been instrumental in establishing Dance Therapy NZ, and a certificate in DMT.

On a balmy autumn weekend in March 2014, a group of students gathered to begin a journey together. A learning journey, and also the beginning of something bigger. Last year was NZ's inaugural year-long *Certificate in Dance Movement Therapy*. It evolved in response to parallel needs in the NZ community- the needs of people who are interested in using dance as a therapeutic practice to gain knowledge and experience; and the need for more DMT practitioners in various communities around the country. The certificate was co-taught by a NZ-born DMT who travelled to USA to train and intern in DMT, Anaia Treefoot, and by Jacquelyn (Jung-Hsu) Wan who trained in DMT at Drexel and then emigrated to NZ from Taiwan in 2012. In addition, several guest teachers were involved in teaching the course, both from NZ and from the USA. We are lucky in NZ to have the expertise of senior DMTs Connor Kelly and Steve Harvey, who guest taught, and also US guest teachers Christina Devereaux, Suzi Tortora, and Joan Wittig. The certificate consisted of six weekend modules, tutorials, assignments and a fieldwork placement. Fifteen students from around NZ completed this first year of training,

and many have gone on to the second year of an Advanced Clinical Practicum in 2015.

DMT is an emerging profession in NZ. While there have been a handful of therapists incorporating DMT into their work for the past 20-30 years, few have been trained to a level consistent with current international standards. Until recently, dance movement therapists in NZ could register along with other arts therapists under ANZATA, however NZ did not have a specific DMT professional body to join and help regulate the profession. In December 2014, DTAA changed its name to the Dance Therapy Association of Australasia to include NZ (and other countries in the region) more explicitly, which reflects the recent growth of DMT in NZ and the subsequent need to have an external body to set guidelines for training and professional practice.

Internationally, the standard for professional DMT practice has tended to be a Masters Level training either in DMT, or a related MA alongside DMT training. We see this as optimal and is what we are working toward long term in a University context. In the interim, the certificate level course is providing an intermediate step in response to the immediate needs in the community.



With the developmental stage of the profession that NZ is at, an apprenticeship type model of training has seemed most appropriate and this is what the certificate has been based on. Whereby, students gain practical experience alongside theoretical knowledge, and where they are mentored as they begin to apply their new

knowledge, at times in settings where they are working independently due to being in a location where there isn't a local dance therapist to work with. This model is particularly being applied in the second year of training whereby students attend a monthly online seminar with two American dance therapy teachers, and a monthly supervision group, in addition to, and in support of, their work with groups or individuals using DMT. And while there was a significant level of interest in the first year certificate in 2015, it was decided to wait until 2016 for the next intake, so that resources could be targeted toward those students who had already completed the first year, to really provide as much support and mentorship as possible due to the emerging status of the profession and what that means on a practical level for many students who can feel isolated geographically and professionally.



Because the profession is not yet regulated in NZ, it has been important that students were aware that the 1-year certificate level training did not qualify them to practice as dance movement therapists. However what it did offer them was a

grounding in fundamental theories of DMT, practical DMT-based skills, and experiential understanding that provides a base from which to facilitate therapeutic dance groups with communities of people with specific needs. The students had prior relevant work experience that served as a support for their learning and integrating new DMT knowledge into work they were already doing. Their backgrounds included: yoga teaching, dance teaching, massage therapy, movement therapy, arts therapy, psychology, classroom teaching, and social work.

In addition to these varied backgrounds, the inaugural student body brought significant cultural diversity. Of the 15 students, 10 were born outside of NZ and emigrated there as adults from Germany, the Czech Republic, China, France, South Africa, Argentina, France, the UK and Hong Kong. This diversity of culture and the depth of prior learning contributed to the students' understanding of the body, of dance, of communication and of learning. There was also an openness in the students that reflects the unique culture of NZ. We are people who are curious and open to trying new things, interested in novelty and new ways of approaching situations. NZ was the first country to give women the vote, we are a culture of pioneers, of being strangers in a new land and making do with what we have, being flexible, adapting, 'giving things a go'. We believe that this is in part what has supported the success and development of Dance Therapy NZ, an organisation that was established in 2012 and has since grown to 10 weekly DMT programmes and 5 Arts Therapy programmes in 6 different locations in Auckland. All programmes are heavily subsidised by grant funding and local councils. The community was open to this 'new approach'. There was a sense of 'this is what we have been waiting for', of a gap, a need to be responded to.



NZ culture and DMT lends itself to improvisation, which is what we had to do when beginning a DMT Training in NZ. We improvised with the resources we had available in the way of guest teachers, who played an essential role in the certificate. We utilised both NZ-based experts in DMT, such as

Connor Kelly and Steve Harvey, and encouraged newer dance movement therapists, DMT students and interns at Dance Therapy NZ to share their developing knowledge and skills in their specific areas of interest and study.

We also invited senior members of the therapeutic movement community to contribute teaching, such as Brigitte Puls, a Psychotherapist with German movement therapy training; Amanda Levey, a Halprin movement based expressive arts therapist; and Rachel Grimwood, a Clinical Psychologist with a background in movement therapy and dance practice. While these professionals may not all have had specialist and/or intensive DMT training, we valued their contributions, related knowledge, and community involvement.



Technology was an invaluable support to the programme. We experimented with guest video teaching via Skype with teachers from the USA. While this presented technical issues such as video freezing and skipping such that quality was lost at times, students nonetheless were inspired by their contact with international experts, and it was exciting to be able to access knowledge from thousands of miles away without the time or expense of intensive travel. In addition, online tutorials were provided for those students who lived out of Auckland, which enabled the core teachers to have more regular contact with the students, and to support those who are geographically isolated from DMT. We also

developed a 'buddy system' to meet the needs of more isolated students, in which they 'met' via Skype regularly to discuss readings and share experiences of their placements.

Google drive was a useful asset in supporting student learning. We used Google documents to mark and provide feedback on student assignments, and then stored marked assignments in specific folders that each student had access to. We also uploaded resources such as readings, handouts, and lecture slides to make these accessible and also to reduce the carbon footprint by way of printing and copying. We experimented with Google hangouts for online tutorials, however found that Skype tended to work best, and now has free group video calling available. In our second year Practicum we have

begun to use the application Zoom, which has been even more useful than Skype.

The first year of the inaugural certificate in dance movement therapy was an

exciting journey, as we tried things out, received feedback from each other and the environment, adapted, changed, tried something new. Not so different to the flexibility, creativity, responsiveness and relationship that are all part of a satisfying DMT session!

This is a journey of learning and growth for all of us as we nurture the development of DMT as a profession in the land of the long white cloud, Aotearoa/New Zealand.

See: Dance Therapy New Zealand
E: info@dancetherapy.co.nz
<http://www.dancetherapy.co.nz/>