

Attuning with the Dreamtime:

cultural linking through dance and movement therapy

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The paper is based on a workshop which aimed to explore links between cultures through the power of the dance. The relationship between Aboriginal culture, dance and mother earth is explored. A description of the experiential component of the workshop demonstrates the potential for dance movement therapy to transform a person into an integrated expressive being. Through connection of the inner and outer being it offers the opportunity for personal power and healing.

*Rainbow Serpent shaping the land
Shaping, forming, shaping the land
Everything it touches changes
Everything that's touched is changed
Touches, changes, touches, changes.*

In the experiential, small group formations chant. The leader acts as the head of snake, leading the group in circular pathways in general space while at the same time the group coils and uncoils through the space.

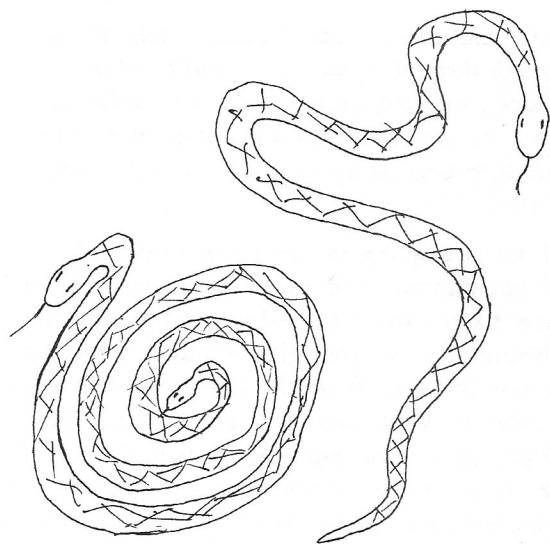
Introduction

My interest in dance was well established prior to coming to Australia in 1964. Since then I have continued to develop and extend my understanding of dance from a range of perspectives. My study in dance as a healing art form has been coupled with an increased interest and association with Indigenous cultures.

Contemporary issues including Mabo, Wik and the Stolen Generation have highlighted the necessity for non-Indigenous people to stop, look and listen to the issues pertaining to Indigenous people. The significance of an association with the Land has been prominent in much of the current cultural and political discussion.

In addition to current contemporary issues surrounding Indigenous matters, consideration

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must be taken into account about other issues arising from changes in our land's population. That is, many people living in Australia migrated from overseas and have adopted Australia as their homeland. As a person living here for thirty-four years, I also have an affinity with this Land. I respect and accept the relevance of my surroundings, the Land, Mother Earth and the way they relate to me and my dance.

I realise along with many like-minded people, that to Aborigines in Australia their Land is inherent to their very being.

It is important that non-Indigenous Australians educate themselves in the historic and continuing impact of white settlement on the original inhabitants of this Land. This in turn will highlight the significance of the association Indigenous people have to and for the Land. We may never have the same understanding as they, but it is through their explanations and information sharing that we may be informed.

Galarwuy Yunupingu, former Chairman of the Northern Land Council, called the Land his backbone and he referred to the Land as an art allowing him to paint, dance, create and sing as his Ancestors had done before him (Moodroodoo, 1995: 206).

David Mowarljari, Aboriginal tribal lawman (Kimberley Region- W.A.) states -

The Earth is remembered as the symbolic voice of the Ancestors. It is our home, our place in creation. If we lose our home, all of the beauty and the wonder could slip into the void of the great unconscious (Langloh Parker, 1993: 17).

Lewis Mehl-Madronna M.D. of the North American Cherokee tribe states -

Our movements, our footsteps honour the earth through ritual, the earth honours us back, we are changed by an unknown power, an energy that transcends and understands us and engulfs us in blessing (1997: 24).

I am attempting in this paper to provide links between cultures and more specifically through dance. I write from a non-Indigenous perspective with reference to Aboriginal culture. I am aware as a non-Indigenous person that I can only glean an external viewpoint into the complexities of Indigenous culture. However it would seem that there is scope to observe and include some of those spiritual values into my personal dance journey. I am mindful that most of my knowledge is of a secondary nature, even so, my interest in this area has enriched my life and is primary to my current work in dance therapy.

Dance movement therapy enables individuals to access the world of dreams, images, symbols, archetypes, memories and insights. We all have our own unique bodies; these bodies can move, think, feel, dream, imagine and touch. Through our dance our bodies contact the earth and we have the ability to access the inner realm of our being.

Accounts of the Relationship to the Land

According to Bell, the Aboriginal people express their totality in the dance, whether it is sacred, ritual or ceremonial dance. The Aborigine is unified with the earth beneath (the feet) with their totemic being, their Ancestral past, the Dreaming, the Law. The Land is Mother. She lives and it is from Her that they have their very being (1983: 249).

Aboriginal people do not think of owning the land but rather of serving it. No one

owns or possesses anything of earth, or its living creatures and Aboriginal languages have no words or concepts for ownership (Lawler, 1991: 283).

The Aborigine lives on, off, and with the land by 'singing it', that is holding ceremonies and rituals on their land and singing to and about the Ancestors who shaped it.

Singing seems to focus the power of the spirit world, the way a magnifying lens can intensify the power of the sun's rays and start a fire (Mehl-Madronna, 1997: 241).

These Ancestors were sometimes human, sometimes animal, sometimes interchangeably both, and they made their epic journeys making love, giving birth, fighting, resting, and in the process transforming a flat featureless landscape into a country full of sacred meaning. In ritual and ceremony the Aborigine listens to the Dreaming language from the Ancestors with and through their bodies.

Sunfly Tjupurta, an old initiated Pintubi tribesman, who had once lived a full nomadic life in the far Northwest of Australia, was recorded by Cowan (1995). He said -

Only when we dance on the earth does its message unfold. We have to care for our country, our people, our Ancestors. They livin' always in the ground, cracks in rock, and in waterholes (1995: 44).

The creative energy and relationships that are hidden beneath the natural world, are brought into the conscious realm. The Ancestral stories are danced, chanted, sung, and imagined, continuing the Dreaming across space and through time, creating and upholding the precious link from the beginning to the present (Langloh Parker, 1993: 6).

Cowan describes that the voices of the Ancestors, the Dreaming heroes, come from under the earth and run like a line of quartz or an underground waterway. They are always waiting for someone to come along and sing them. They belong to Mother Earth, but when they are sung the Mother feels she is being listened to and is nourished (1995: 84)

I have watched land die from lack of nurture. Without the presence of the mythical hero silence is cast over all (Cowan, 1995: 15).

Although the spiritual Ancestors are believed to be in a sleep state their nourishing energy still pervades a place, it is deemed sacred and only the initiated are acceptable there, according to

Lawlor. The potency of the Ancestor is present as spiritual energy, music and seed power. The gathering of groups for rituals keeps the vibrancy potent and the Dreamtime (culture) alive and flourishing (1991: 15).

Each traditional Aborigine is given a specific section of mythical adventures to keep in memory; the story of their specific tribal area must be told, and the particular pathway and the singing that the Ancestor made must be re-enacted. These are the songlines or mythlines which criss-cross the whole of Australia, and for the traditional Aborigine these must be preserved.

Totemism is central to Aboriginal religion. It is the connection with humanity, nature and the gods. All forms of life to the Aborigine share a commonality of attributes and are profoundly related. Certain totems belong to certain clans because of stories associated with their country, others may be more individual, for example the kangaroo, ant, crocodile. The special intimacy with a totem - that is becoming familiar with the motion, the habits and actually studying the totem - brings about a deep empathy and understanding of an aspect of nature. The totem possesses a person.

Lawlor explains that a prominent taboo is the prohibition against eating the flesh of one's totem animal (1991: 328). The totem can also form a link between people, the same one being shared with others in far distant places, thus creating social adhesion.

Many Indigenous cultures throughout the world are based on harmony between humanity and the natural world.

When we are in harmony with the earth our cells are in harmony with us. Harmony is the music of Healing (Mehl-Madronna, 1997: 241).

Many Indigenous people listen through all their senses to the various languages of the natural world. It is interesting to note that in many Aboriginal tribal languages the words 'listen' and 'understand' are the same. Tribal members 'listened' to the rocks, trees, celestial bodies, wind, water, shadows, seeds and fire. They chanted and danced and moved this understanding. From infancy, empathy, concern and compassion for all life were taught. Along with this went an upholding of the deep responsibility to the group and the kin within the group (Langloh Parker 1993: 11-12).

We, like many Indigenous people carry our own story, the collective memory of experiences that make us wiser beyond our present knowings and deeper than our life history. Beneath the

surface crust of our consciousness is a great untapped resource - a larger life story. To tap this larger story it is necessary to be mindful that the elemental properties of air, water, rock and vegetable matter are also buried in our being.

Workshop Experiential

The following is a written account of a journey of integration with Mother Earth and the beauty and spirit of Her natural world, taken with the workshop participants at the national conference. Patterns of connection can be found with the cosmos, earth, and humankind.

*Earth am I
Water am I
Fire and Air
And Spirit am I*
(Ilyana, 1996)

The experiential draws on the Five Part Unfolding sequence (Leventhal, 1993) and uses the dance elements to connect with the creative process within the experience. Form is promoted from the outer to the inner and the inner to the outer. At all times the participant is encouraged to be in control of the choice, expression and form of their movement. Trust is an essential part of the process involved and a safe holding environment is imperative for the forming, transforming to take place.

1. Initial Authentic Movement Stage

At this level a new state of awareness is sought, heightening senses, feelings, thoughts, and kinaesthetic movement.

The Rainbow Serpent Dance with chanting in the groups, uses whole body movement in both individual and group space. This allows the participant to let go of all outside influences and begin to connect physically, psychologically and spiritually.

2. Expressive Movement

At this level concrete expressive movement uncovers patterns and extends into new patterns. Awareness of these movements is enhanced when they are performed in individual space with eyes closed.

Through the chanting and moving of the four elements earth, air, fire and water the participant has an inner visual focus from which to draw a concrete movement form, and which may then be extended.

3. Unfolding Movement

The exploration of the movement allows it to spontaneously grow in a very exciting way, moving the group more and more into the unexpected and unfamiliar.

The group chanting gradually fades and the movement and the dance naturally grow, deepening the experience and deepening in all aspects the connection with nature and the universe. At this stage the dancers demonstrated total involvement and attunement with each other and with their feeling for the land.

4. Dance Movement Form

This is a time for selection and choice, a time for creativity, which moves beyond improvisation to decision making. Clarity of form is attained. It is through this process that there is an integration of consciousness and awareness, from the inner to the outer.

The participants become consciously aware of specific movements that have been insistently repeating, as these are the movements that are speaking and asking to be listened to. These movements are then built into a movement phrase with a beginning, middle and an end and are rehearsed to sharpen and bring clarity of form. They are accepted and unembellished and become like an abstracted form.

5. Integrated Movement Expressed

The purity of the abstracted form can be performed and witnessed and can also lead to verbal exchange, self interpretation and insight. It can be a stimulus and a process for ongoing motivation and for insights and integration.

The abstracted form was taken back to the original Rainbow Serpent grouping. It was first drawn in symbolic form on a large sheet of paper as a group mural. Each member of the group shared their movement sequence in all its vulnerability. The group accepted this as a soul gift in a total non-judgemental manner, honouring in silence and non-committance. Then each member verbally stated what the experience had meant personally.

"Healing and forming appear to be closely aligned, since healing is an integrative multi-dimensional bringing together of disparate, disowned parts of all aspects or qualities of self, returning the organism to balance and harmony." (Leventhal, 1995: 21)

Closure

In closure of the integrated journey the instructions given to the group were as follows:

I hope you are able to take away with you some of your primordial images, look on them with a sense of sacredness. Give time and space to living as fully as possible in the natural world. Be aware of our natural connection with plants, animals, places and people, and allow yourself to marvel and feel the harmony.

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