

# An Historical Event:

## The Embodied Protégé: Fifty Years of a Moving Legacy

A panel presentation moderated by Dr Marcia B. Leventhal

### *Reflected on by Jane Guthrie*

This particular panel session at the ADTA conference (San Diego, St Jolla, California, October, 2015) was one of great historical significance – certainly to me and many other conference delegates. It should have been a plenary session, but it wasn't, it was only one of a list of appealing concurrent sessions to choose from in the same time slot. And in hindsight I am glad that it was presented in this way. The fact that probably over 100 people packed into a space not really large enough to hold them added to the vibrancy of the occasion and buzz of expectation palpable in the atmosphere.

There wasn't a spare seat anywhere and many conference delegates were standing squeezed in at the sides of the rows of chairs or back of the room. I was lucky - I managed to make my way towards the front to sit on the floor in the centre aisle with several others. From here I was able to hear well and see the speakers.



Marcia B. Leventhal

You may wonder why I thought that this presentation was so historically significant? The answer is because in a panel moderated and orchestrated by Dr Marcia Leventhal, a speaker and second generation pioneer herself, there were no less than seven other speakers who were all second generation pioneers. There have of course been many wonderful panel presentations in

previous ADTA conferences by many of these speakers, but this one was extra special for two main reasons amongst others:

Firstly, there was more of an urgency about listening to the tales to be told by this group of DM therapists as they are of course getting older - as indeed we all are. And although it was a wonderfully vibrant occasion, I certainly had an acute sense of time marching on and that it was getting more important to indulge in just listening to tales to be told and that this could be a once in a life time opportunity. This feeling, which I think was shared by many, of course related to the very recent loss of Claire Schmais (who was to be on the panel) and also Arlynn Samuels. They were both second generation pioneers whose celebrations of great lives lived was reported in *Moving On* vol. 12, no's 1&2 – a very recent publication.

Secondly, the presentation was on a very special scale of planning and organization, beautifully prepared and orchestrated, with the panel carefully chosen to include a wide range of second generation DM therapists, all who were protégés of, and representatives of, the work of the first-generation pioneers from the US. The protégés expanded on their experiences of working with their mentors and enlarged on the legacies that were left to them to pass on. In carrying all the legacies left to them forwards they all became leaders in their field and surpassed all expectations of them in building DMT as a profession (Leventhal, 2015, Conference Proceedings).

### **The pioneers from the US**

The names of the pioneers the panel focused on, that we know so well, are probably first and foremost Marion Chace, 1896 –1970, known as the grand dame of DMT; Blanche Evan, 1909 – 1982; Liljan Espenak, 1905 –1988; Trudi Schoop, 1903 –1999; Mary Whitehouse, 1911- 1979, and Alma Hawkins, 1904 –1998.



**Eleanor DiPalma, Joan Chodorow, Nana Koch and Iris Rifkin-Gainor**

The high profile panel of protégés totaling eight DM therapists, were mentored by one or more of the founding DMT pioneers mentioned. The panel included Marcia B Leventhal, who also acted as moderator; Elissa White, Sharon Chaiklin, Jane Wilson Cathcart, Iris Rifkin-Gainer, Eleanor DiPalma, Nana Koch, and Joan Chodorow.



**Sharon Chaiklin**

presentation is on the influences of the pioneers mentioned, the presenters all acknowledge that there were of course many other influences in their work. Examples of other great influences in the field are again names that most of us would know from our knowledge of the history of DMT. They include for example, Irmgard Bartenieff, Judith Kestenberg, Valerie Hunt and Elizabeth Polk. (ADTA Conference proceedings, 2015)

I particularly liked the idea of the ‘embodied protégé’ – with the emphasis on bodily absorption of learning through the physical presence of the mentor, and how this learning can be so strong because it is so firmly imbedded. The protégé carries the legacy forward in their work through loyalties to the mentor and rich influences received, at the same time as also coming under other influences, developing their own ideas, taking their own directions and making their own discoveries.

This made me think about how strong some of the learning I received from my mentors still is and how it formed such an important basis for further learning. It is not possible to gain this depth of learning from reading an article, or book, for example, or in the majority of training situations. It requires a situation of more personal and ongoing feedback and guidance to become so embodied – as in ongoing mentoring situations in, for example, internship situations.

As Leventhal (2015) so succinctly put it:

*In the field and profession of DMT, the protégé is truly the living, organic example of being embodied* (Leventhal, Power Point, 2015).

The eight women on the panel presented some of the most important things they had learnt from



**Jane Wilson Cathcart and Elissa White**

These eight people together with others, specifically Claire Schmais and Arlyne Samuels, developed University level training for DMT in the US, provided the beginning of the structure of the ADTA, wrote articles and books as references in the DMT field, and undertook the earliest research, as well as developed their own clinical practice, methods and techniques, that continue to evolve (ADTA Conference proceedings, 2015). The panel all shared their early associations with the first generation pioneers who they said both stimulated and inspired them to become leaders in the field themselves. And although the focus in this



their experiences with their mentors that resonated with them. Some beautiful stories were told, which unfortunately are not documented; some were very funny but hopefully the session was recorded and they will be available for reading at a later date. I was entranced by the stories but did not take notes so my writing is based on my memories, supported by drawing from the conference proceedings and information from the slide presentation.



### **MARIAN CHACE (1896 – 1970)**

Marian Chace mentored Sharon Chaiklin, Jane Wilson Cathcart and Elissa White. Sharon Chaiklin was apprenticed to Marian Chace at St Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington D.C. at the same time as Claire Schmais (1964).

Sharon alludes to both she and Claire having moments of confusion when receiving answers to questions they asked and Sharon said that she soon learnt to ask the same questions in different ways to get an expansion on the answers! She said that it was only later when she was working elsewhere that she fully integrated what she had learnt, with the basic information then firmly planted in her body. She shared Chace's belief that people wanted to be "seen, heard and understood" (Conference proceedings, p.116). Also, to trust in the dance and the therapist's presence as a validation and creator of the climate in which true movement expression can emerge (Leventhal, 2015).

Jane Wilson Cathcart "was influenced by Chace's being in the moment, moment by moment, with both continuity and spontaneity" (Conference proceedings 2015, p.117). Also, the importance of the body and bonding with others in rhythmic action (Leventhal, Power Point, 2015), as well as again the importance of everyone needing to be "seen, heard and

understood" (Conference proceedings, p.116). The major influences for Elissa White were in Chace's creative ability to attune to a client to meet them, and her belief that dance is a healing force.

White thinks that dance training is really important in bringing about the creative ability. (Conference proceedings 2015). Also, that DMT makes use of communication between people and that rhythm and movement are essential in getting communication to occur.

### **BLANCHE EVAN (1909 – 1982)**

Iris Rifkin-Gainer was mentored by Blanche Evan from a very early age, in fact from the age of 3, and this was ongoing until Evans' death in 1982. She

was in a position to witness the change in Evan's work from creative dance to DMT (Conference proceedings, 2015). The main points as expressed on the Power Point



presentation included the individual being viewed as the sum of his/her psychophysical parts; that the elements of creative dance as we know them stimulate the imagination and lead to "ownership of the moving body" and in the Dance Therapy associative process personal movement, words, memories and images all provide dynamic links to each other offering varied access to content.

### **LILJAN ESPENAK 1905 - 1988**

Both Nana Koch and Eleanor DiPalma were mentored by Liljan Espenak who was in turn influenced by Wigman, Adler and Lowen.

Nana Koch named learning about the power of dance improvisation as a means of expression of thoughts and feelings when words were not available and the value of assessment - in this case - Espenak's Movement Diagnostic Tests. As well, she learnt about the way that Espenak developed her DMT from the influences of the work of Adler.



Eleanor DiPalma learnt how to balance many roles together and to be able to talk about the principles of DMT. Also, about the key principles from Espenak's Postgraduate Training Program which were named as

“body-mind unity; cultural dance; basic emotions; diagnostic value of movement; therapeutic rapport” (Power Point presentation, Leventhal, 2015).

### TRUDI SCHOOP 1903 - 1999

Joan Chodorow was mentored by Schoop. She highlighted Mirroring, Exploration, Centering and Unity as key parts of Schoop's work. Schoop would apparently often start by 'entering' the qualities of her patients' movements to try and get in touch with their inner experiences, and then gradually help them to shift to a wider range of possibilities. Chodorow talked about Schoop's interest in the “reciprocal nature of the body-mind connection” (Power Point presentation, Leventhal, 2015).and in exploring opposites which moved her patients towards finding new centers. Unity was also named as an important part of Schoop's work and she worked with her patients towards finding unity and clarity.

### MARY WHITEHOUSE 1911 – 1979

Joan Chodorow was also mentored by Whitehouse, as was Marcia B. Leventhal. Chodorow's key points included mentioning Whitehouse's earlier 'Movement in Depth' based on a mover and teacher and the idea of polarity where actual and imagined pairs of opposites were explored that led to awareness of simple body movements and the interrelationship of the opposites. Chodorow also referred to the importance of Symbolic Amplification, or the form of the movement from within as it emerges and Active Imagination. This is related to the urge to move, drawing on involving people in “fantasies, image-experiences and dreams” as the

material to help them to understand themselves (Power Point presentation, Leventhal 2015). Key points emphasized by Marcia B. Leventhal included attention to the felt level, where attention is needed to the urge to move; and finding and focusing on the responses from dance forms created; the vocal responses during group processing and being sensitive to the communication and interchange between mover and facilitator.

### ALMA M. HAWKINS 1904 – 1998

Marcia B. Leventhal was also mentored by Hawkins and influenced by Hawkins' ideas about the untapped creative potential of the individual and that dance is a key resource for clients to form creative processes from – forming being fundamental to healing and holding.



Also, that as a creative process, dance, by involving the emotions, can lead towards a healthier well-being through broadening the thoughts and using the art of dance as a means of healing.

The Conclusion, from Leventhal, centered around returning back to Marian Chace and her creation of DMT, and pointing out how alone she (Chace) felt in believing that no one understood her or the therapy.

Leventhal said that today:

*“ we have each other in supporting our beliefs, our knowledge, and our practice, in our unique profession of Dance Therapy. ”*

... and she also emphasized that collaboration and our numbers now provide us with a powerful foundation that we can learn from, from these protégés, know the importance of mentoring and the responsibility of providing legacies that are needed to develop, grow, and keep our profession viable.



A very special ending followed. The centre isle where I was sitting had to be cleared and we gathered even closer together as each presenter moved from the front of the room to the back, down the centre –embodying in dance form the influences their mentors had passed on to them.



And as they did so, the DM therapists who were there and hungry for the stories told - entered the movement with them - as one by one they made their way dancing to the end of the crowded room. It was a time of togetherness and full attunement with each one of them.



They honored their mentors and we honored them in a truly satisfying and beautiful conclusion.

**Photographs:**  
Tony Zhou, p.44, 45, and top right this page.  
Other photos - Jane Guthrie

