

Introduction to Dance Movement Therapy at Ikon Institute, Australia

This new elective DMT course was included this year in the Bachelor of Arts Psychotherapy (BAP's) at two of the Ikon Institutes in Australia (Melbourne and Brisbane). The course was created by Jane Guthrie, Heather Hill and Sue Mullane to be facilitated as two x 3-day teaching blocks over two consecutive weeks. Although not amounting to a training in DMT, it forms a very substantial and comprehensive introduction for students wanting to know more, with its 42 hours contact time and approximately twice as many non-contact hours for preparation and assignments. Perhaps ideal for people thinking of committing to a training program, but are not sure and it also seemed an ideal addition to the BAPs program by bringing an expansion in working with movement and dance. Through the DMT teaching the students were introduced to another means of broadening individual expressivity and communication, working towards relationship building.

The course material covered:

Day 1: The dance in dance movement therapy

Day 2: The Meaning of Movement: Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) for DMT

Day 3: The Embodied Therapeutic Relationship (Pt.1)

Day 4: From dance to dance-making for DMT

Day 5: The Embodied Therapist (Pt.2)

Day 6: Australasian DMT theory and practice: some examples.

The assessments were based on participation /attendance; a small group presentation to demonstrate via written statements and dance their understanding of one choice of three topics; and a written assignment of 3000 words.

Ikon Institute course, Melbourne, Victoria

Sue Mullane wrote that “the opportunity to teach an introductory course in dance movement therapy to arts therapies students in January this year was a joy and a privilege for me. The joyous aspect came from introducing improvised movement to a group of savvy, life-experienced adults, some of whom were very new to dance. The delight of watching their transformation from being hesitant and coy to rapidly finding their personalized, wildly creative schtick was the part that I found thrilling. Particularly in a concentrated course such as this, students’ bodily expressive learning curve was steep.”

Sue went on to say that “the privilege for me came from recognizing the responsibility that we facilitators held as we introduced DMT to others, not as clients, but as critically engaged members of the broader arts community who were standing at the cusp of their chosen careers. This responsibility was necessary to ensure we passed on knowledge that challenged students’ physical capacities and intellect, that stimulated their aesthetic sensibilities, and gave them reason to begin to think about their relationship to movement. It was necessary to establish a rich learning community that for just two weeks resonated deeply in its concentrated form amongst us. And it was necessary to firmly contextualize contemporary, Australasian DMT as a relevant and vital profession for our times, so we could part our ways at the end of the course knowing that if this was all the students might ever learn about DMT, then at least their emergent understanding was intact.

The responsibility I felt for facilitation of the course was prefaced by the duty of care Jane, Heather and I experienced in writing the course, early 2018. Despite our collective expertise at writing dance movement therapy curricula, we were struck by the challenge of defining what is critical, “must know” DMT knowledge that could be facilitated and assessed in the context of this program. Whatever we taught to the students needed to encompass the fundamental aspects of expressive body-mind unity in theory as well as practice. It needed to focus on individual experiences to maximize student self-awareness as a creative, embodied being, and draw out the relational, intersubjective experiences through group movement. The student cohort was comprised of those enrolled in several Ikon arts therapies courses as well as those external to Ikon, so we had to ensure that the gradual unfolding of the learning tasks over the program was commensurate with a group of adults who did not necessarily know each other but might be interested to get to know each other. We could not know in advance of students’ experience of dance, so were very mindful to

begin at the beginning, by asking them to attend to their own uniquely living, breathing mind-body and expand on their self-awareness of this as quickly as we dared so that they felt sufficiently confident to notice “the other” in the room and begin to form relationships. Central to our development of the program was our attention to the detail of providing a progressively layered approach to the theory we chose to introduce, the supporting DMT literature we chose to reference the theory, and to the movement activities reflective of the particular theory within each day and between the days. We incorporated multiple reflection and discussion times through each day and left sufficient “wriggle room” in the program that we could improvise on the planned tasks if need be, to follow the trending growth and development of the group.”

Jane Guthrie, who was teaching with Sue in Melbourne, added that “she feels that the expressive movement modality of DMT formed a foundation for the development of the other, more centrally placed, arts modalities in this degree course. It provided the potential to expand them in multiple ways in a movement and dance medium, as well as to draw from that medium itself and support it with the modalities that were more familiar to the students. In this way what was produced by them on a day to day basis was really rich. Teaching such committed creative arts students was very rewarding, as they responded to each day enthusiastically and with total application, expressing how much they had learnt and their appreciation for the teaching. The group presentations where they were divided in five groups were all excellent and so different, enhancing what they were doing through utilising the wide range of material they were offered. We had twenty dedicated students, who totally embodied everything that they were led through, and in many cases took themselves way beyond this in their experiential and theoretical learning contributions. They all also really appreciated gaining a better understanding of human movement and the body mind connection.”

Ikon Institute course, Brisbane, Queensland

And from Virginia Woods and Alice Owen, who presented this six-day Introduction in Brisbane:

“We each facilitated three days, and because it was the first time we were facilitating it, we doubled up some days with one person supporting and observing the other. This approach was found to be very necessary during the assessment tasks and presentations.

Ikon Institute had most of the teaching resource material on Moodle with access through WiseNet. Having all the readings, course outlines and so forth accessible to the students through Moodle made other aspects of the delivery easy, although we found the marking rubrics quite unfriendly to a Dance Therapy context. Probably the most difficult part of delivering the course was learning how to do academic tasks such as marking using an online system.

The twelve students who elected to do the course came with varying degrees of dance experience but shared a common degree of enthusiasm and commitment. All the students understood the usefulness of movement-based experientials within the context of art therapy practice and were keen to gain some practical knowledge related to the field of dance movement therapy. We were very impressed with the quality of the students who were almost all mature age with a deep commitment to a career in the counselling field and a lot of life experience.

It was a delight to see the students embrace creative dance and all the other aspects of dance movement therapy so fully and from the beginning. Without exception, they committed themselves fully to embodying and experiencing the concepts we presented. Each student’s movement skills visibly changed over the two weeks, and their ability to articulate their experiences of the dance journeys was remarkable in its depth, after such a short time.

Students reported experiencing the power of moving and expressing through the body. They all expressed how this experience had changed their own body and self-awareness, and how dance movement therapy as a body-oriented approach is an important inclusion in therapy. Despite the tight time frame, students presented work of a high standard. The presentations were diverse and creative and generally clearly demonstrated the chosen topic. Some of the students earned distinction for their written work.

To our delight, several of the students are going on to further study in this field. One is currently completing Tracey Nicholson’s Grad. Cert. in Somatic Movement Based Therapy on the Sunshine Coast, and another student is moving to New Zealand to do the Masters course on offer there.”

We understand that this very successful course, both written and staffed by Professional Members of the DTAA, will be continuing.