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Exploring Dance/Movement Therapy in Post-Conflict Timor-Leste

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Abstract Dance/movement therapy (DMT) is considered an effective therapeutic modality for people who have experienced trauma because it facilitates access to body-felt trauma responses. Antecedents of DMT, including the use of dance and music in traditional modes of healing, point to the potential for it to be effective for people strongly connected to traditional culture. Yet the literature regarding the application of this therapeutic modality in post-conflict and developing nations is modest. This article discusses an exploration of DMT as a vehicle for positive change in Timor-Leste. The people of this half-island developing nation have experienced trauma and dislocation over many generations as a result of waves of punitive colonization and consequent social turmoil. An introductory program of DMT that was offered to address issues including: health and well-being, peace-making, recovery from trauma and creative engagement, is described in detail. This includes exercises to develop body awareness, grounding and centering techniques, and opportunities for personal expression. An exploratory qualitative evaluation, including leaders' observations of participants' movement responses and participants' post-session verbal reflections, offers evidence of the relevance of DMT for this post-conflict context and significant positive outcomes from these activities. Issues such as cultural appropriateness and the challenge of sustainability, where there are no trained professionals and few funding opportunities, are addressed. The article concludes with recommendations for the integration of DMT with the powerful role of traditional dance in this community, and reflections on more sustainable practices for visiting professionals.

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Introduction

This article discusses the potential of dance/movement therapy (DMT) as a modality for positive change in Timor-Leste. It documents a series of community-based activities presented by a group of Australian dance/movement therapists in that developing nation. A brief introduction to the context of Timor-Leste, its geographic location, and its complex and troubled political history, is followed by an overview of the relevant literature. This includes the role of music and dance in Timorese life in the past and present, the application of DMT in cross-cultural contexts, and DMT with survivors of mass trauma and in post-conflict developing countries. The work of dance/movement therapists Amber Gray, David Allan Harris, and Sarah Boas is a particular focus.

Described in the article are: characteristics of the diverse groups the therapists worked with, the planning process, activities offered, as well as the evaluation process and resulting findings from participant feedback. The article concludes with reflections from the practitioners on the potential for future DMT work in Timor-Leste.

The Context of Timor-Leste

In the tiny half-island nation of Timor-Leste, north of Australia and southeast of Indonesia, people live in the relative peace of a new democracy. Yet the lives of most Timorese have been impacted by traumatic events, either directly or indirectly (Modvig et al., 2000). During the 24 years of brutal occupation by Indonesia between 1975 and 1999, as much as one third of the population died from sickness, starvation, or murder (United Nations Development Programme, 2010). Civil disturbances that erupted after independence, in 2006, 2008 and a tense fortnight in 2012, continue to compound people's experiences of trauma.

Everyday life is still an ongoing challenge in Timor-Leste. The vast majority of people experience poverty, literacy levels are low (UNICEF, 2012), and child mortality and family violence rates are high (TLAVA, 2009). As yet, there are few professional counseling services for people who need support to work through these issues. There are virtually no psychologists, therapists, or counselors in practice. Few programs providing opportunities for engagement in therapeutic activity through the arts, including dance, exist in the country.

Despite these overwhelming odds, the Timorese people have a remarkable story of survival. Their success in resisting far more powerful nations provides their strongest base of shared identity (Trindade & Castro, 2007). Their culture has offered an abiding source of identity and stability throughout their turbulent history and into present times (Brandao, 2011), including the flourishing of "many different language groups, fiercely independent family units, complex marital and

commercial exchange systems, animist religious practices and effective health treatment and cures” (Connelly, 2003, p. 2). Culture and traditional practices still provide the primary means of conflict resolution and peace building in most Timorese communities (Brandao, 2011).

Dance and Other Artforms in Timor-Leste

Cultural dance forms, accompanied by traditional music played on locally made percussion instruments, continue to play a strong role in Timorese ceremonial life, as they have for centuries. Traditional dance offers a powerful and inclusive vehicle for release and expression of individual and group emotion (Dunlop, 2012; King, 1963; Siapno, 2012). Newer forms of dance and music, influenced by other cultures, are a feature of most social occasions, including Portuguese-style partner dances and line dances from Indonesia (King, 2012; Siapno, 2012; Sloman, 2009). Music and poetry were powerful symbols of resistance during the Indonesian occupation (Lipscomb, 2010; Santos, 2008) and music was used to encourage voting in the referendum in 1999 (BBC, 1999). A form of uniquely Timorese contemporary music is now emerging. Timor’s most well-known musician, Ego Lemos, sings to contribute to the formation of a new national identity (Skinny Fish Music, 2012), while Galaxy, one of Timor’s most famous bands, blends indie-rock with Timorese traditional songs and chants to create a distinctive sound (Howell & Dunphy, 2012).

Literature Review

Dance/Movement Therapy and Trauma

A considerable body of literature addresses DMT with trauma in Western cultural contexts, particularly ‘domestic’ trauma related to sexual abuse and domestic violence (Bernstein, 1995; Chang & Leventhal, 1995; Devereaux, 2008; Goodill, 1987; Helmich, 1992, 2009; MacDonald, 2006; Meekums, 1991, 1999; Mills & Daniluk, 2002). Dance/movement therapy applications with refugees and survivors of war and organized violence including torture are discussed by authors including Reca (2011), Callaghan (1993), Gray (2001), Koch and Weidinger-von der Recke (2009) and Levy, Ranjbar, and Dean (2006). Several studies examine work in Israel/Palestine and with Holocaust survivors (Baum, 2009; Gordon-Giles, 2011; Mendelsohn, 2006; Serlin, 2008). Dance/movement therapy is emphasized as a nonverbal and symbolic method uniquely suited to working with the somatic dimensions of trauma. This dimension of trauma healing is increasingly supported by trauma research and contemporary neuroscience (Harris, 2009; Lucas, 2012).

Dance/movement therapy practice in settings in which therapists are outside their own culture and engaging with ideas and practices of a host community, can be multi-modal and framed in a way relevant to the host community (i.e. ‘peace building’ or ‘finding possibilities for living’) rather than specifically as ‘therapy’ (Singer, 2006, 2008; Swain, 2009). Basic tenets of DMT, such as the significance of the client-therapist relationship, may even be questioned (Singer, 2006). Despite

these challenges to practice and thinking, the clinical grounding of a DMT practitioner remains vital. Dance/movement therapist Tsung-Chin Lee, for example, working in a disaster-affected community in Taiwan, emphasizes the importance of a practitioner's clinical training and experience in minimizing any secondary trauma (Capello, 2012).

Although the application of DMT is documented for various multicultural settings (Bernstein, 2012; Cohn, 1997; Devereaux, 2012; Farr, 1997; Pallaro, 1997), and the considerable intercultural work of dance/movement therapist Meg Chang (2006, 2009) challenges us to engage more deeply with the ways race, culture, and ethnicity are embodied, the work of dance/movement therapist Sara Boas stands out for her systematic approach to the practice of DMT across cultural boundaries. Boas (2006) understands all humans as active agents of culture and the "group as a social microcosm in which therapist and client work together to dance a world into being" (p. 127). In her Transcultural Competence Model, Boas outlines five key kinds of competence that support the effective and ethical transcultural practice of DMT. These are: specific and generic cultural knowledge; the intra and interpersonal skills to apply this knowledge; and an attitude of inclusive or transcultural consciousness (Boas, 2006). Boas argues that dance/movement therapists need to learn about their own cultures and those of their clients, cultivate awareness about key ways that cultures differ, (i.e. collectivist-individualist), and develop the ability to apply this awareness in relationship (2006). Yet, she believes that ultimately DMT practice "may be all the more ethical when we relax the boundaries of the self and give our full attention to the here and now of the myriad diversity between us and within us" (Boas, 2006, p. 125).

A small body of literature on the application of creative art therapies in post-conflict and post-disaster developing countries includes a limited number of DMT-specific or movement/dance focused case studies. American dance/movement therapists Amber Gray and David Alan Harris are at the forefront of DMT application in post-conflict developing countries and with survivors of severe trauma. Gray has practiced in this field for more than 20 years, working around the world, and particularly with street children and victims of organized violence in Haiti (Gray, 2001, 2002, 2008, 2012). The Center Post Model is a DMT intervention that she developed specifically for refugees and survivors of torture, war, and disasters (Johnson, Lahad & Gray, 2009). Drawing on current neurobiological research, this model helps clients work toward emotional and physical re-integration, and reclaim a safe sense of self after fracturing through traumatic experience. It draws on, and works to re-establish, external and internal connections and sources of safety and positive identity. External resources may include culturally familiar forms of dance and music, which engender a sense of safety, pride, and strength. Internal resources include developing or re-establishing a sense of relative safety in the body through connection with key physical markers such as the spine, breath, and sense of weight (Gray, 2010). Harris (2002, 2007a, b, 2008, 2009, 2010) has extensively documented his DMT work with former child soldiers in Sierra Leone and with African refugee youth in America.

Both Gray and Harris highlight the potential for DMT to tap into and integrate local cultural forms and ritual practices, providing a bridge between Western

biomedical approaches to trauma, and local culturally grounded understandings of suffering and healing. Gray (2008) states that DMT can be a “medium in which the cultural and social practices essential to recovery from extreme stress...can be cultivated and integrated into a larger-scale healing process” (p. 233). The importance of local arts and cultural practices in individual and collective healing processes is evident in other writing about movement-based arts therapy interventions in post-conflict developing nations including Cambodia (Herbert, 2012; Shapiro, 2008; Shapiro-Phim, 2008), Angola (Swain, 2009) and Serbia (Singer, 2008, 2009).

The context of international development for healing work in disaster or trauma-affected communities brings additional ethical considerations. Singer notes that development work can lead to disempowerment and dependency when donors and outside agencies take on a caretaker role. She discusses how broader issues such as human rights and unequal access to resources must also be considered in these situations (Singer, 2006, 2008). Citraningtyas, MacDonald, and Herrman (2010) caution that incoming parties, including humanitarian workers and therapists, can even cause a “second tsunami” after a disaster (p. 121). These authors advocate for programs in which the “community is the protagonist,” and all external agents are “supporting parties” (2010, p. 121). All of the dance/movement case studies addressed, directly or indirectly (through discussion of the local contexts and relationships that initiate and embed the work), the additional ethical consideration of how DMT work in disaster-affected communities can be sustained over time.

Method

This project used an exploratory qualitative research approach to investigate participants' experiences of DMT. An exploratory method was necessary because this study charts new territory: no previous research was found on DMT in Timor-Leste. The modest literature on DMT in other post-conflict situations, as discussed above (Gray, 2008; Harris, 2007a, b; Swain, 2009), were also exploratory. Of those, only Harris (2007a, b) and Swain (2009) implemented systematic evaluation processes, both of which were qualitative. Given the nascent stage of DMT practice in post-conflict and developing nations, we considered it most appropriate to take the most open approach to our findings, and to offer a description and analysis of the opportunities and challenges of DMT in this context. In time, a suitable theoretical frame might be developed and studies with a more formalized methodology might be undertaken.

Semi-structured interviews (Boyce & Neale, 2006) and a collective reflective process (Bolton, 2001) were the specific techniques for evaluation used in this project. Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) principles informed our process, in that findings were emergent from the data, as we therapists had no certainty about outcomes that might be achieved. In all sessions, time was allowed for participant reflection and group discussion around the material presented, individual and group experiences, and thoughts on further applicability of the work in participants lives. In two of the groups, written feedback was also invited in the form of short stories

about participants' "most significant change" (Davies & Dart, 2005) experiences in the workshop. As the majority of these responses were in Tetun (one of Timor's national languages), translated versions of the original responses were read and thematically analyzed.

Observations of participant and group responses were also used as a form of data. The researchers' DMT training, including Laban Movement Analysis (Newlove & Dalby, 2007), offered a frame for analysis of movement. After each session, leaders met to discuss perceptions of participants' responses, and to reflect on the choice of activities and the overall facilitation. Insights from others also informed this reflective process. In Dili, this was provided by local co-facilitators/interpreters, and in Lospalos, by the host organization's project manager.

The iterative process of feedback and cultural interpretation provided by these supporters contributed to more successful practice, particularly because the researchers were working so much outside their own experience and often without the benefit of direct verbal communication. The valuable insights of these collaborators are examined in more detail in the discussion section.

The Project

Background

The project was initiated by the author as part of her role as Director of Many Hands International (MHI), a non-government organization that has been active in Timor-Leste since 2010. MHI seeks to promote cultural assets-based community development, which includes a focus on work in and through the arts. While the organization had previously hosted arts projects, none of those had a specifically therapeutic intention. The author was joined in this project by two other dance/movement therapists from Australia, Meredith Elton and Alex Jordan. These two brought expertise as dance/movement therapists, performers, dance improvisers, and community dance leaders, as well as valuable skills in working cross-culturally and with trauma, conflict resolution, personal process and group work. Jordan also had recent experience working through dance and the body with trauma with refugees living on the Thai-Burma border and diverse groups in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

This program coincided with a period of post-election disruption, the most intense political unrest that Timor had experienced in four years. Capital city, Dili, was in curfew as our group arrived because of anticipated trouble. On the second day, after being advised to leave the city and go straight home, we found ourselves skirting a large tank and military personnel armed with machine guns lining the streets. We drove to the airport on the last day of the troubles, along the road that had been the site of shootings, burning, and stoning during much of the fortnight of our visit. While significant trouble did not erupt, there was a strong atmosphere of tension and apprehension in the community throughout our time in Timor-Leste.

Project Goals

The aim of this project was to explore the relevance and potential effectiveness of DMT in the developing nation context of Timor-Leste. While DMT is unknown as a formal profession in Timor-Leste, dance is ubiquitous in community-connecting and ritual functions. Based on the awareness of the political history of Timor-Leste, a key area of interest included the potential of DMT to contribute to trauma healing and peace. This intention became a central consideration in light of the unrest Timorese people were experiencing as the time of the project; their exposure to real and current danger and potential triggering of former fears and trauma.

Workshop Activities

The team of three dance/movement therapists brought a diverse range of training, skills, and ideas to our activities in Timor-Leste. However, all activities were anchored within common goals to share some of the fundamentals of DMT with professionals and community members in Timor-Leste. Each session was planned collaboratively, paying heed to the overall goals as well as the specific needs perceived for each group. All workshops were co-facilitated, with team members taking responsibility for different sections.

Common themes and activities explored in the sessions included;

- Body-based warm-ups to develop awareness of body and body parts
- Body scanning either in stillness or movement
- Drawing of body maps
- Grounding/centering techniques (e.g. focusing on awareness of breath, spine, and weight)
- Expanding movement experience: experimenting with movement elements such as directionality, shape, and dynamics of movement
- Experiences of connecting and attuning with others through movement: mirroring, shadowing, echoing, etc.
- Exploration of body boundaries, one's own sense of kinesphere, and boundaries in relation to others
- Movement improvisation games and skills such as walking and exploring space and connecting with others, improvisation with props, freeze games, 'Follow the Leader' and 'School of Fish'; (in which small groups move in synchrony)
- Opportunities for personal expression including movement from and expression of feelings, movement based on personal and group themes and stories, and sharing of hopes and dreams.
- Relaxation: progressive relaxation and guided imagery.

In nearly all sessions, opportunities for free expression organically led into a communal traditional dance. These were usually performed in a circle accompanied by songs expressing themes of hope and togetherness that participants shared spontaneously.

Events

Before arriving in Timor we had an ambitious plan to connect and work with different groups every day. This was curtailed by the political context, so the team regrouped daily to review plans in the changing situation. A first thought was to cancel planned events, but it was decided instead to see the situation as an opportunity to make a positive contribution during a time of stress. In the end, despite the unrest, the team delivered a full and varied fortnight of activities with a diverse range of groups.

The program began in capital city, Dili. The first activity was an all day workshop for young people from troubled communities at the community organization *Ba Futuru's* Centre for Peace. This was the first day for a new cohort of program participants, so activities in which students and youth facilitators could get to know each other were requested. This was followed by a participatory workshop for children with physical disabilities and their support staff at ASSERT Disability Service, and a weekend workshop on the theme of dance for health and wellbeing open to the general public. In the far eastern region of the island, several activities were offered: two professional development workshops in the town of Lospalos for staff of non-government organizations who work with children, a dance exchange with young performers from *Sangar Haburas* performing group, and a community dance session in the remote village of Leoru.

Dance for Health, Wellbeing and Peace Workshop

This section discusses in detail a public workshop on Dance for Health, Wellbeing and Peace held in Dili. The full 2 days of this event provided a good opportunity for a range of DMT concepts to be explored, as well as time for discussion and other reflective practices. Workshop participants were diverse: mainly Timorese women, including members of women's social support group *Circle for Peace*, staff from *Ba Futuru's Centre for Peace*, a staff member from a local disability advocacy group, and a European staff member of the UN. Also attending were an Australian director of police development and two passers by from the street.

Extending beyond the general goals and initial plans, this event was re-structured to include the theme of peace so that the dance/movement therapists could respond to feelings of stress and anxiety that was anticipated, given the state of ongoing political unrest. The therapists were also mindful of the specific professional development interests of group members. There was hope that the work would complement and extend on participants' previous training, such as *Ba Futuru* staff's skills in physical theatre and also that local staff assisting in facilitation and language interpretation would gain valuable on-the-job experience in workshop leadership.

While the workshop was approached with an emphasis on professional learning and sharing with participants, there was also a wish to provide group members with tools for ongoing personal exploration and self-care. We were acutely aware of the need to provide a safe context for individuals' personal exploration of the ideas presented.

Day One began with a spoken welcome and introduction that included rules of the space and comfort, for example, permission for participants at any time to join in or sit out and observe. Participants seemed a little apprehensive about what was to come and later reported feeling grateful for this permission offered at the start.

The first activity was a warm-up in a circle that focused on specific body-parts, beginning from the feet and working up to the head. As a safe introduction to moving, the facilitator demonstrated simple movements for the group to follow and explore in their own way. This activity was followed by a short period of stillness, before the group was led, with eyes closed, through a body scan. Participants focused mentally on different regions of the body to identify what sensations (e.g. pain, tension, warmth, sense of flow, etc.), as well as any associated thoughts or images, they were experiencing. The group then created body-maps by recording their thoughts, feelings and sensations on body outlines that had been pre-prepared. Participants then discussed their body maps with a partner as a means of de-briefing and of grounding the morning's experiences through verbalization.

After a break, a directed warm-up that had a focus on releasing, free flowing, and relaxed shaking movement was used to bring participants' awareness back to the space and their bodies. This was followed by an experience of mirroring, echoing, and shadowing through movement to introduce these concepts and encourage awareness of self in relationship to other through movement.

The group seemed inspired by the up-beat music playing. The music ranged from lively North African music (Rango), Australian a capella (Coco's Lunch), to techno beats (Del Gado). The group responded with animation in their movement and later expressed verbal appreciation of the effect of the lively music. This activity transitioned organically into a free dance to release any tension arising from the activity.

This was followed by a more direct experience of body boundaries and personal space, and the beginning of an exploration of body sensations relating to fear and comfort. Working in pairs, people were asked to notice changes in their own body sensations as their partner walked towards them. They were given permission to indicate for their partner to stop, come closer or move back. This activity was repeated with the group walking towards a central individual, who stopped the group at his/her own discretion. This indicated each person's sense of personal space or boundary. The group found this work highly challenging and revealing, as reflected in the group discussions described in more detail below.

After lunch, the warm-up focused on attending to kinesphere; the amount of space each person takes up and enjoys. Participants were led through an experience inspired by improvised dance techniques of travelling and attuning to self, space, stopping, starting and connecting/walking and moving with others. This section concluded with re-visiting the body maps drawn earlier in the day. Participants were asked to scan again through their bodies and notice anything new or different they wanted to add to their map. A discussion after a break focused on the possibilities, and challenges, of the application of these experiences to participants' lives and work. The day ended with a long progressive relaxation.

On Day Two, explorations went a little deeper. A sense of directionality was added to the body parts warm-up. The mirroring and attuning activity of the

previous day was extended to include an improvised dance technique of complementing and contrasting with the movement of others. After the morning break, an interesting but challenging group discussion explored feelings of comfort, wellness, and peace in the body, versus arousal and fear. The group considered how they recognize these feelings in themselves and others and ways of managing them. This was followed by a movement experience of breath, spine and weight, key markers for grounding, and familiarization with the body from Amber Gray's Center Post Framework (Gray, 2010). In this activity, participants started from, and returned to, a walking and standing baseline of self-awareness.

The afternoon's activities focused more on expressive movement, making movement from feeling, and drawing from visualization of scenarios. This led into a physical storytelling activity, inspired by the work of Steve Harvey and Connor Kelly (Kelly, 2006) that continued the theme of exploring emotion through movement. Participants shared a significant personal story aloud one at a time, then one or two group members used a few key words as a starting point for movement that expressed the significant feeling states they had understood in the story.

The final session of the workshop began with an extended visualization-based relaxation. This was followed by a discussion and reflection on the weekend's activities, their use and potential application in participants' personal and professional lives. Participants were then asked to offer their experience of the weekend anonymously in writing. The workshop closed with a movement ritual in which participants travelled between two lines of their peers, being offered energy and encouragement verbally and through improvised movement by the group. Then in a circle, the whole group offered energy inward to each other and out to others in our lives and the world, and to support our individual journeys back out into the world.

Results

Outcomes for Participants

This section presents the key themes arising from the evaluation of participants' experiences of the work. The discussion largely focuses on the outcomes of the two-day Dili public workshop described above, but also draws on data collected about other activities.

Overall there was a strong sense of personal and group engagement with the DMT activities presented. Most attendees participated with great enthusiasm, and their smiles and laughter indicated significant enjoyment. Participants seemed to be very open to new and deep experiencing. We observed slowing of movement into the activities and the focused way people 'dropped in' to the work and their bodies.

The key area of the work that seemed to be appreciated by participants, as reflected in both verbal and written feedback, was the sense of personal opening and development of self-awareness, or realization of self that DMT offered. As one participant expressed in her 'most significant change' story, "Through this

movement, I can think positively in my life and develop myself by recognizing the limitations that I have. Feel who I am; know who I am.”

A strong focus of this awakening was on body awareness. Participants expressed excitement at their discovery and new awareness of body parts, and wonder at the personal experience of sensing internally during body scans and other activities with an inner focus. One participant in the *Ba Futuru* workshop, for example, reported the experience of a body scan as “amazing,” as she was able to focus on and feel individual body parts to the exclusion of her usual focus on “so many other things.”

Extending from this basic awareness, participants also reported a deepened understanding of the connection between body sensation and emotion, or psyche. An indicative comment from written feedback included: “I know and recognize the feelingin my body parts. I feel there is a connection in my body with expression and feeling.” Activities such as body mapping and exploration of feelings with movement provided a pathway for participants to explore and enhance this connection. The room was abuzz with words, laughter, and tears, for example, after body mapping activities, as participants discussed the range of sensations and emotions evoked by their movement exploration.

Along with positive sensations, the work also aroused several strong experiences of fear and unrest in the body. One participant described her sense of falling and dizziness during a body scan undertaken with her eyes closed. Another participant reported finding herself in a state of arousal with a fast beating heart after activities that focused on awareness of breath, spine, and weight. In the latter case, one facilitator sat with this woman into the break, facilitating grounding through re-orientation of her awareness to present sensations.

Participants in the Dili public workshop also discussed potent experiences relating to body boundaries and the power relations involved in negotiating these, both in the activities designed to explore these issues and others. One participant shared her strong feelings of being trapped and overpowered by her partner during the mirroring activity when it was her turn to follow. Another participant in the workshop with *Ba Futuru* staff reflected on how these movement activities caused him to reflect on feelings of being overwhelmed by non-verbal power dynamics that he experienced in his work as a mediator with older men in remote villages. He commented how those feelings impacted his capacity to interact and work confidently.

Despite the challenges it presented them, participants in several groups commented on the potential for management of emotions through movement, and the benefit they perceived in this. Participants in the Dili workshop indicated clear emotional release and transformation, both in individual experiencing and in the process of group sharing about their experiences.

In the physical storytelling activity, storytellers reported that they gained insight by having their own feeling states reflected back or danced for them; and the group was able to collectively reflect on a commonality of felt experience through individuals' stories. Several people recounted their appreciation of the power of movement to lighten, energize and strengthen. This comment was indicative: “When I first attended this activity,...I felt tired, lazy and had a headache.

After...the two days...I feel like my body begins to lighten and become energetic and strong.”

Another key area that participants enjoyed was the power of non-verbal connection and attunement with others. Participants in the different settings, from children to professionals, engaged easily and joyfully in activities such as mirroring and “School of Fish.” Many commented on being delighted by the unexpected sense of connection and support these activities provided. One young woman in the public workshop in Dili shared the way she felt moved by her sense of attunement with others during an improvised dance activity of walking, stopping, and connecting. Looking out at the hills where she lived, she remarked on her capacity to feel “at home” and “amongst family,” even though she knew she was in a studio in Dili, with strangers.

For several participants, the benefit of calmer, quieting and focusing activities for personal health and wellbeing seemed to be a revelation. Others discussed how they valued the benefits of the work for stress reduction and relaxation. One woman commented that, “I feel relaxed after doing this activity. I can...take away the stress that I felt during this week. That’s why this activity is very good.”

Overall, participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity DMT provided for them to experience and learn new techniques and tools for deep personal exploration. Alongside positive sensations and experiences, participants were interested and willing to connect with difficult personal stories and sensations and to find new ways of understanding and transforming these. Positive responses to the workshops, like this one below, were typical, and indicative of this view:

I am happy to attend this therapy- I feel excited because during this week, I feel stressed with the situation. Because I thought that maybe people would have conflict again and I am so afraid maybe my house is going to be burned again. So when I was invited to participate in this dance/movement, I said that, yes, I really want to go. The biggest transformation that I had in my body parts is that my body is not feeling pain, and when I am doing some movement, my heart is not beating so much.

Discussion

How the Work was Useful: Leaders’ Perspectives

A number of aspects of these core DMT activities seemed to resonate strongly with the groups and contribute to the success of the work. The creation and maintenance of a safely held space in which people could explore and observe experiences of tension and emotion appeared to be central. Participants confirmed this with comments indicating that they appreciated the space created in the workshops for experiences to be observed, held or supported, and then understood or transformed.

The most basic DMT activities such as body part warm-ups, combined with repetition and then expansion into similar movement ideas, were the most

successful. In the two-day workshop in Dili, use and repetition of basic movement concepts allowed the group to develop confidence in moving and exploring this new shared language of movement.

Opportunities to focus on individual somatic experience yielded strong responses, both revelatory and uncomfortable. Although there was space and time for holding and transforming experiences of arousal and discomfort, on reflection, the dance/movement therapists felt that more attention could have been devoted to participant safety. For example, offering options for managing stimulation levels such as keeping eyes open during body scans and guided imagery, and sitting or standing rather than lying during relaxation.

The most powerful shifts seemed to occur in non-verbal experiences of moving and feeling moved. The more conceptual or abstract components of the work—sharing information and facilitating discussion around trauma, feelings, safety, comfort, and arousal—were less energetically received. While discussions about experiences of the work and ideas for future application offered insight, participants often labored over verbal analysis. In hindsight, requesting verbal reflection of participants' experiences may have been premature. Our limited knowledge of local languages and culture and the reliance on interpreters and non-verbal communication, made it more difficult to introduce and facilitate more conceptual and complex exercises and discussions.

Although at times frustrating, our limited language skills and cultural understanding were also, with awareness, opportunities for sharing of leadership and surrendering more fully to the co-creative potential of the groups we worked with. For example, an easy co-facilitator relationship emerged with the two interpreters in the weekend workshop, as both had experience leading creative movement activities and were also keen participants in the workshop. They often facilitated, in the group's more fluent Tetun, a collective exploration and clarification of the translation and meaning of particular words and concepts. This process contributed significantly to the culture and rhythm of the group and seemed important in enabling a greater sense of ownership of the space and work by participants.

The opportunities for sharing leadership with participants and local facilitators, and contribution to the group culture and emerging process—to “work together to dance a world into being” (Boas, 2006, p. 127)—were key to the success of the work. These strategies seemed to be an important aspect of the potential of DMT, as highlighted by Harris and Gray, to tap into and integrate local cultural practices and understandings. Echoing Boas, they offer a useful focus for further research.

Overall, the expressive, body-focused, and collective dimensions of DMT appeared to resonate with participants' familiarity with dance as a significant cultural force. This also supported many opportunities for reciprocal exchange and the sharing of leadership. Timorese traditional dance arose spontaneously and frequently during workshop activities and was central in our dance exchange with the young performers of *Sanggar Haburas* group from Lospalos. In the village of Leuro, the movement workshop with a large group of children drew most of the village as enthusiastic onlookers. At the end of the workshop, everyone stayed gathered around and the researchers spontaneously started sharing some recordings

of local music. One track inspired an older lady to come into the center of the crowd of children to lead everyone in a traditional dance. While we dance/movement therapists had instigated the activity, ultimately, through responding to the “here and now” of the encounter, the space that was co-created provided an opportunity for sharing and celebration of local culture alongside the western DMT-inspired offerings.

The collective experience working with collaborative, improvisational, and emergent processes in community dance and performance in a range of cross-cultural environments was particularly helpful in supporting the dance/movement therapists to be open and responsive to the considerable unknown of each group and the broader cultural context in Timor. Boas's (2006) concept of transcultural consciousness highlights the importance of giving “our full attention to the here and now of the myriad diversity between us and within us” (p. 125), and the ability to appreciate and support this diversity when working transculturally. Such ability is essential for expanding opportunities for sharing leadership and enabling a genuinely collaborative experience.

A powerful instance of the co-creative potential of the work took place on the second day of the weekend workshop as explorations of ‘sadness’ through expressive movement occurred. One participant, slowing and coming to her knees, began to cry softly. The lead facilitator went to sit with this participant while the other stayed moving with the rest of the participants. Soon, at the wordless instigation of the group, everyone gathered around this participant, sitting and kneeling quietly, as if this arrangement was part of the “dance of sadness,” taken to a more immediate and deeply felt place. Following the mood of this group dance and the participant's subtle signals, the lead facilitator offered minimal verbal framing and support, maintaining a calm, supportive presence and gentle touch. This presence was amplified and sustained by the encircling group: a collective witnessing of an individual's expressed sadness/grief, a feeling widely acknowledged by others in the group as being felt but not so readily shared in their own lives.

As facilitators from western cultural backgrounds striving to practice with transcultural competence and offering workshops in a spirit of sharing and openness to relationship, it is sometimes forgotten that the people of the host culture can be highly adept at relating cross-culturally. Timor-Leste has a long history, predating Portuguese colonization, of integrating different cultural forces (McWilliam & Traube, 2011). It is a country with four national and thirty local languages, where indigenous circle dances are regularly practiced alongside Portuguese partner dances and Indonesian line dances. Several participants in the Dili workshop were part of a women's *Circle for Peace*, a group that had been inspired by ideas from an international feminist conference. Locals joked that Timorese people are keen to attend any workshop offered by foreigners, perhaps in part motivated by the wealth and opportunities that foreigners present, but also out of curiosity to engage with new people and ideas. The capacity to relate cross-culturally and to integrate different cultural inputs is an important aspect of Timorese culture to consider when tapping into local processes of resilience and recovery. Recognition of and support

for this local cultural capacity emerged as an important basis for sharing leadership and contribution to the group process.

DMT is a medium that can support a transcultural encounter where both parties co-create a healing process. This co-creation is an essential element of DMT's potential to contribute to the recovery and wellbeing of participants. Boas' work, particularly her suggested focus on the way that leadership is shared in transcultural settings, can usefully be applied to DMT work in such post-conflict developing countries. This approach could deepen practitioners' understanding of how both parties contribute to the culture of the group and the emergent healing process.

Practical Development: Dance/Movement Therapy in Timor-Leste

At the end of the project, there was a strong sense of the positive potential for DMT in Timor-Leste, provided it is applied in sensitive and culturally appropriate ways. After each workshop, the participants and researchers were able to envisage a clear plan of what would be done next with each group, and how the work overall could be developed. For example, one participant, who was a police officer, suggested that training in non-verbal communication across cultures would be very useful for the Australian Police Force. The need for more professional development for teachers and facilitators was also evident.

This perception was corroborated by a significant number of participants who expressed a strong desire for ongoing learning and professional development. Many commented on the potential they recognized for DMT in trauma healing for themselves and others, and how they saw this as vitally important for the future of Timor-Leste. They also recognized a need for skills in self-care in the work they were doing with other traumatized populations, and saw DMT as being able to provide this.

Participants commented on the potential of DMT work in facilitating connection and empathy that could make a significant contribution to the very important task of peace-building in Timor-Leste. Several of them spoke with great excitement about possibilities for direct application of these ideas in their work in specific areas, such as mental health and women's health, as well as within their families and communities. Indeed, some participants applied the learning immediately, returning to the second day of workshops with positive reports of trialing activities with families and friends. Several young women were excited by their experience of free and improvised dance, expressing a desire to establish a group to explore this further amongst fellow students and friends.

While responses and level of understanding of DMT varied between the different groups, there was strong engagement amongst all participants from professionals with related experience, to tertiary students, to children in a remote village. Almost every group invited the researchers to return and explore the work further. This very positive response suggests that DMT has relevance for a range of populations in Timor-Leste and that dance/movement therapists' skills are sufficient and useful there, despite the significant cultural and professional differences between we facilitators and our program participants.

Limitations

This article explores participants' responses to a series of single sessions of DMT in Timor-Leste. The use of qualitative exploratory methods seemed appropriate for the task of understanding an exploratory series of activities. While the analysis of the observations and findings was quite informal, the triangulation offered by the team of three, who were alternatively observers and supporters in the activities, as well as independent input from the local interpreters and host organization representative, strengthened the findings. The most significant limitation of this project was the one-off nature of the activities. This limited the conclusions that could be drawn from the work, other than to indicate potential for more, longer term, work.

Issues of Concern

One significant concern arising from the project was the sustainability of the work in Timor-Leste. The researchers had undertaken this project as unfunded volunteers. While host organization MHI covered the workshop presentation expenses, we paid their own travel expenses. No clear possibilities have yet emerged for funding of the work, which is an important factor for provision of ongoing programs. Two leaders of groups that we worked with commented that new ideas were interesting, but without ongoing input, their staff would be inadequately skilled to employ any of them. This feedback was taken seriously as it was important to not waste people's time introducing ideas and practices that would not be of future use. To this end, a strong emphasis on skill development of leaders occurred.

The Director of ASSERT disability service expressed that the main issue is not whether new modalities such as DMT are wanted, needed, or are useful in Timor, but rather whether visiting practitioners can sustain a collaborative working relationship through time that allows such modalities to take root and evolve in a way that is useful for locals.

Conclusion

This article argues for the potential of DMT as a vehicle for positive change in the developing island nation of Timor-Leste. A range of DMT activities was offered as a pilot by a group of dance/movement therapists from the neighboring country of Australia. These activities included exercises to develop body awareness, grounding and centering techniques, and opportunities for personal expression.

Significant positive responses to the DMT activities that were offered to address issues including health and well-being, peace, and recovery from trauma were evident. The literature about DMT in cross-cultural contexts and with trauma survivors, including significant theoretical perspectives from Gray, Harris, and Boas, confirms support for such offerings. The role of cultural dance and other traditional modes of expression seemed particularly important in the healing experience, like for those in Timor-Leste, whose connection to traditional culture is still strong.

The most successful activities offered were those in which the physical dimension was prioritized, reducing the need for intensive verbal communication and analysis. One significant challenge was that of sustainability, with these new ideas about DMT application perceived as potentially not useful when there was no likelihood of ongoing professional input and development. This project indicates the potential of DMT for creative exploration, positive social connections, and even trauma recovery, for the people of Timor-Leste that is not currently being provided, if the challenge of skill building for local professionals could be addressed.

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