

Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice

Volume 3

Issue 4 *Expressive Therapies Research and Thought
Leadership Authored by Members of Lesley's Institute
for Body, Mind and Spirituality*

Article 6

Summer 2007

Remembering the Collective Body

Dicki Johnson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/jppp>

Recommended Citation

Johnson, Dicki (2007) "Remembering the Collective Body," *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 4 , Article 6.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/jppp/vol3/iss4/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Lesley. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice* by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Lesley. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lesley.edu.

Remembering the Collective Body

Dicki Johnson

A Dynamic Understanding of Attunement and Healing

Home: Late Fall, 2006: A circle of stones remains, unmoved, at the threshold of my home. Offspring of the earth's union with the sea, the collection is varied in size, texture, patterns and color. They were waiting for me last summer in the shore's low tide outer perimeter: The lifetime of these stones has primarily been one of immersion, under the sea, within larger rocks. Here at home, they remind me of the hidden. I notice today that the unmoved have gathered, into their original circle of kind, the fallen pine needles of surrounding trees.

Incorporation, Nature's Body and Voice and Voice Internalized

East Hampton, N.Y., 1960: The room itself feels like a fount of light, shaped by glass walls whose pale blue draping shroud then reveal the surrounding landscape. With silent reverence, we anticipate the familiar music, the prelude to our shared ritual; Nature's voices amplified around us, we sit, a circle of bubbles inside a huge bell which sings the songs of the wind, of the sea and of the birds. Moments earlier, whispering and giggling girls wearing sneakers and shorts, we moved toward a chest of drawers, Pandora's box (we remember that only "Hope" was left in that box).

Our voices stilled now, we open the drawer, anticipating the simple silk garments that assist in our transformation: Goddesses.

I loved that metamorphosis, which seemed to begin when I held the silk tunic in my hands. The world became still and warm, my friends became sisters who shared a secret with me. Like the fairies and elves of nature imagined, we entered the realm of inspired music, truth and beauty. Here in this place we were both heroic Amazons and diaphanous winged creatures, changing, with the music, like the many faces of love.

Here we held the hands of Athena and Aphrodite in our graceful walk through the midsummer's forest. Here in Nature's garden, no fear, anger or hate darkened our innocent hearts, no judgment or competitive spirit interrupted the rhythmic beating of our collective heart: Actualizing a vision I'd read about, or remembered from some place, I was ennobled yet humbled, peaceful yet joyful. Running the chase of the wind, swimming the dynamic sea's ebb and flow, circling and entwining, we girls were the flower maidens, nymphs, fauns, satyrs, and graces of Dionysus, the Bacchae, and of Botticelli.

Communing with Nature: Her rhythm, her secrets, her promises, was our birthright. The light, which we experienced in our personal awakenings, we understood to be the twinkling of the greater reality to which we all belonged. We little girls, danced, assuming truths, which the physical frame or brain independently, could not access.

These truths could never be translated verbally. I don't remember talking about our shared experience. Were there any words to describe the musical inspiration or the streaming of soul light, which ennobled our bodies with spiritual grace? Here was a place to honor our affiliation to all of nature's life forms, to our ancestors and to our progeny. Here was one of the temples of Isadora Duncan, where I received, as a child, the gifts of her legacy. Home: 2006: I return frequently to this memory; it flows through my veins, it moves my bones, it inspires my creative heart, and assists in my ability to aspire, to hope. My meandering path has taken me to places where man has turned away or has been taken from the light of communion. It is in these darkened rooms of despair that I have experienced the indomitable nature of the human spirit: Life's continuum, past flowing to future. I see a hand digging into the earth's memory of "Belief", pulling out a victorious fist full of life, which is then offered up to heavens with renewed "Hope".

Affiliation: Transforming Mob to Flock

Boston State Hospital, MA, 1980: I observe the collective: Mentally retarded men and women housed together because of a common affliction. Slow moving and thinking, they have been isolated from the social and intellectual fast lane. Somewhere, later on, I learned that the oldest meaning of "affliction" includes: "a vision or spiritual sight that follows upon a time of darkness and torment." I think of the hand digging into the earth.

The most intellectually "bright" of the group insists on disconnection from his peers, aspiring to be part of the staff collective, mimicking word phrases and gestures of those heroes. Judgment: Who decided that people should be grouped according to their afflictions, disabilities, torment, and pain rather than for their strengths, their ability, their inspiration, and their joy? As a young woman, an Expressive Therapies intern imbued with the memory of the Garden, I understood that light and dark exist in us all. And...in nature there is no judgment. It occurs to me that gazing into the mirror created by relationship, one will see reflected back the profane or the sacred; the task at hand would be to help my "afflicted" charges to access the sacred in each other. I remember the girls in my Duncan circle, or more accurately, I don't remember them. My memory is of the transformed collective created by our shared relationship to Nature's rhythm. That bond is deeper than any man-made distinction which segregates and falsely restricts: the rich from the poor, the black from the white, the ambulatory from the sedentary, the leaders from the followers, the old from the young, the male and the female. That rhythm moves through us all, and as we respond to it collectively, the "Mob" of egocentric isolates is transformed to a "Flock" of beautiful beings experiencing themselves as one organism.

I am back inside the bell. Sacred voices long lost have been reclaimed as we sit, encircled by the institutional walls. The "affliction" has taken on its oldest meaning, as a selectively mute, profoundly retarded man remembers his song. Holding on to the perimeter of a parachute, we are able to circumambulate without holding hands, moving like an embodied mandala, which calms our collective body. The visual circle ripples, wave like, in its repetitive path. We focus on the stillness we encircle, and experience the creation of, or reconnection with, something greater than "I" or "Them." The sounds

which are amplified in this stillness, are the sounds of our feet stepping in unison. And then the voice emerges from deep inside the bell: The voice of the sacred remembered. The man made mute by his oppressor (a world which ripped him from the vortex of life's rhythm) begins to sing, to the beats of our step, in perfect Latin, the Bach/Gounod "Ave Maria".

Surrender

Affiliation and Solitude

Home, 2006: After an intense reconnection with memory, I am drawn out again by the visual distractions in my room. Two photos which I have placed together because of their stunning similarity, and a painting of a mother/child team, challenged by the blowing wind, hanging their laundry. The photos, of individual offerings, are my husband and my son each with plates of fruit. The painting, created by a young woman friend, is one of her last; a brain tumor brings her to the end of her life. It is autumn, and I'm thinking how grateful I am for the seasons, with their cyclic changes, and their promised returns. I think of choices I've made. I think of the life cycle. I surmise: All life forms have in common a beginning and an ending. The living of one's life is the passage which lies between. The length of the passage varies from person to person, from life form to life form. Choices we make determine the types of relationships we will form with the natural environment, with the people around us, and with ourselves. One of those choices involves surrender or resistance to this flow of life. I think of driving a car on an icy surface, surrendering to the skid's path rather than braking. In body work forcing resistant muscles always yields more intense resistance. Surrendering involves trust in the rhythm of nature that envelops us. Resistance is fighting that rhythm. The choice affects how we perceive and consequently care for our bodies, our peers, our families, and our world.

Isadora Duncan expressed a theory of continuous movement that included sensitivity to the literal and metaphorical flow of energy into and out of the body. In search of movements expressive of the human spirit, her technique: glorifies natural movement, sources rhythmic and emotional links fundamental to all life forms, and traces dance to its sacred roots using mythological archetypes and ritual. My understanding of this theory came through my childhood embodiment of it, not through the words written about it. I have reminded myself of that every time I have been tempted to teach with words rather than actions.

Empathy, Intuition and Socialization

Center Studio, Boston, MA: 1987: The garden, the visual symphony, is composed of flowers, whose tempos of entrance and exit vary with their colors. Blossomings appear random as they are rarely in unison. Yet do they not all respond to the same underlying rhythm in their self determined unfolding?

The former patients of "deinstitutionalized" Boston State Hospital now reside in various community residences. The weeds and wild flowers have now moved in to share territory

with the cultivated specimens. Center Studio is a microcosm of this merger; here we find oasis, as we source our similarities rather than differences. DMR (Department of Mental Retardation) is looking for activity based socialization programs for their “clients”; many of them are sent to Center Studio. I have gained a reputation as one who will work with the improbable. My students are all superlative: too young, too old, too aggressive, too sedentary, too deaf, too blind, too fearful, too fearless. In this place I will, also, begin to carry on Isadora Duncan’s legacy as I invite children to become part of the heritage, dancing her choreographies. In time, the two populations and respective programs become one. Children, tunic-ed, cross the threshold into the dance space, as the deaf, mentally retarded adults exit. They understand and acknowledge their connection as they pass the torch: the shared room, the music, and the light. Outsiders question the “appropriateness” of letting little children, the rose buds, be exposed to the “Mentally defective”, the weeds. I wonder if they believe that what is hidden does not exist. (We play “ Peek-a-Boo” with babies to contradict this misconception.) Before children learn to judge and qualify beauty, they understand that all life forms are “One,” ebbing and flowing, rising and falling, opening and closing.

I notice that many children experience a loss of this innocence, and a dampening of their intuition and empathy, around the age of four years. Socialization is responsible. It obscures their vision, and their clear affinity to the “One” that they are; they look for the differences that define “ugly.” They stop looking inward for the answers, waiting to be told what to do, how to think. Fortunately, the memory of that innocence is held and hidden in our bodies. Our affiliation is stronger than this socialization and can be reclaimed. It is inclusive rather than exclusive.

Integration of Voice and Movement

The gestures and steps, the physical architecture of each Duncan dance, I remembered from my childhood. Closing my eyes, I envision the movements. I hear the music and lyrics sung by my teacher. “ Step, step, stop..and run,run,run, and turn around. Left and right and turn on your left foot.....”: Bach’s Little Fugue. The lyrics, simple present tense words, ease our bodies into synchrony with the music’s rhythm. I recall, with precision, each choreography, as I sing the lyrics. Simultaneously singing and dancing, I feel a sense of integration, within myself, with the music. Here is a nugget: I am able to recall all of these dances, which have lain dormant in my body for many years, by listening to the music. This reminds me of what I understand free association to be. Music triggers the return of the lyrics, and the lyrics move my body to dance the steps which they describe. I assume that this process is not subjective, but has a neurological basis. Assuming the neurology for retrieval and learning, I include the integration of present tense lyrics and movements in my evolving theoretical framework. I continue to search for “One way”: If my dance treatment protocols were determined by the varied disabilities of my students, I would be lost in the number of variations. So I attempt at one simple foundation based upon my evolving assumptions:

- 1) A beginning circle , a consistent ritual of affiliative movement gestures with accompanied lyrics,
- 2) A series of interactive dance etudes which encourage the exploration of relationships to the social and physical environments, and
- 3) A soothing ending circle which mirrors, in part, the beginning. This architecture is circular. It cycles between contained and open space. The peer dynamics it describes are safety and risk taking.

Transformation and Resiliency

Home, 2006: I am often asked the question: “What do you do?” I long for a simple title, which would summarize the fusion of roles I assume in my work. I am not quite a dancer, nor a therapist, nor a teacher, nor a director, nor a musician, nor a trauma specialist, nor an inspirational leader. At this point in my career, it is impossible to introduce myself with one simple, two lined business card: One name and one title. My understanding of the deep and primitive affinity in all life forms comes from my experiences in many worlds. From each world I have gained a title, and each title gives me entry into associative venues. I see myself sometimes, akin to a chameleon. I have the capacity to change the color of my skin. Skin deep is my title. The heart inside beats the same song regardless. At Center Studio and, later, in my work at day care centers, I wore the skin of “dance teacher”. My “clients” became my “students; Group therapy became community dance. I understood that I was a guide, a catalyst, who assisted the isolated in their process of remembering and reincorporating. The vehicle was dance, the process was therapeutic. I entered other rooms with more facility wearing the skin of Expressive therapist, musician, teacher, trauma specialist, or mother. My early relationship to Nature and to music provided me with the foundation necessary to feel comfortable wearing clothes of different colors. My relationship to the changing yet constant physical and social world provides the fruit for my work content.

Jimmy and Ricky, best friends and profoundly retarded young men with Cerebral Palsy, come to mind. Their twisted, “quiet hands” were frozen in spiraled knots. They taught me about the power of “Belief” as, inspired to reach out and touch each others hands ,rhythmically to beautiful music, their paralyzed arms moved toward each other, unfolding, The energy of aspiration does exist; my physical body reaching for something is undaunted if assisted by emotion. So, if I extend my arm, and think of something I really want or believe in, and put that energy into my reaching arm, that arm will not falter in its reach. I recall the descriptive phrases of many teachers past: “Move into the Reach” “Emotional desire will lift you up”. That which moves us from the heart is stronger than any movement initiated by the musculature or skeleton.

Attachment and Relationship

At Risk Children

My First Dance Program at a Full Time Day Care Center, Inner City, Boston, MA.

1988: The circle now becomes a huge nest; I am the mother bird attempting to feed the many eager and opened mouths. My hungry charges instinctively push and tumble over one another, in their singular drive toward nourishment. Biologically-induced tunnel vision lead them to me, their foster mother; the food they seek: sustained, responsive, consistent and supportive response, is filled with the necessary ingredients for attachment; attachment is necessary for relationship building. Each of these little birds is in need of their own maternal reflector, and I become the mirror to be shared by ten. These little birds are not yet three years old. I formulate that their initial peer experience is competitive, in this huge shared nest. How could it be otherwise? Since their hatchings, they have spent most of their waking hours, seeking 1:1 attention from the full time caregiver who replaces their biological mothers. Her arms are not big enough to hold them all: Premature introduction to turn taking. Her impossible job is underpaid, undervalued. I want to help. I hypothesize the following: A cooperative, harmonious experience of the peer group is vital for full time day care children. This could neutralize their primary experience of peer competition. The visceral experience of a cooperative social environment will be internalized, even if it is not yet cognitively understood. So I sing to all that will listen, "Let us mirror smiles, songs and the gestures of affiliation. Let us sound the gong of nature remembered, the birthright of all her children".

Home, 2006: I look around today's group circle, which is composed of ten, two-year-old children and ten adults. The parents form a sparkling necklace, which wraps around the collective neck of the children. The children meander in and out of the ritual provided by the familiar Raindance songs and gestures; periodically, in stillness, they stop to gaze at ,and listen to ,the adult collective. Voices and arms rising and falling, rhythmically, like the sun. Each moment of connection seems full of wonder and pride for the children: Rites of passage; tradition making; community building. Unusual, and seldom routine in contemporary social interaction, is this circle of children with their parents. I think of how rarely children observe, and later mimic, their adult collective engaged in actions intended toward harmony.

Acute Trauma, Archetypes and Repetition

Ankara, Turkey: 1999: Earthquakes here have left thousands of children homeless; the sky still wraps around them, the sun continues to rise and set, but the cracking and shaking of the ground represents an unpredicted tempo change; The Turks tell me that the earthquakes are to them, what snowstorms are to us. Part of nature's ebb and flow, they do not kill. Man's creations are the killers: buildings, roads, walls, which create edges of resistance to Nature's flow. Their children are afraid. They watch the birds fly away. Their sense of safety and trust, relationships with dependable people, places, and things, has been shattered. Routine is resisted. They fear walking in their villages, going to

school, and sleeping at night. Mother Nature has revealed her dark side: Betrayal, abandonment, severed attachment, isolation.

As part of a team commissioned by UNICEF to develop an intervention for these Turkish children, I was invited to bring my circles of gesture and song to the world of acute trauma. We envisioned an expressive multi modal intervention, which included CBT, rhythm and movement, art, psychodrama, and cooperative games (Macy. Macy. Gross & Brighton, 2003). Our collaboration, CBI, will be implemented in the Turkish schools by local healers. This intervention will assist Turkey's children in remembering peace, expressing their narratives, and regaining a sense of hope; past, present, and future, the remembered experience of life's continuum: a circle, rather than a severed line.

This is new. Can I train people to intuit, to tap into the light source? Is there a formula, with steps to follow, that will encourage access? I am challenged to hold true to my belief: This kind of knowledge is gained through experience, not through reading words that describe it. I listen to my body as I observe: Our intervention's evolving framework has a circadian rhythm to it. Like the daily evolving and dissolving of light to dark to light, our structure, CBI, follows an action/ rest cycling: The familiar, the dependable, the affiliative circles, like watering holes in the desert, frame the narrative, central activity. From and to, the comfort of home one ventures out into the wilderness in search of completion: relationship making, story telling, exploration, mastery. The light of dawn, of safety, of home, internalized, becomes the ship which carries him forward, through unpredictable waters. Belief transforms to Hope. Dark will resolve to light. Home awaits, at dusk. These metaphors sit well for me. They illustrate the conceptual circle as symbolic of that which is constant: Like the predictable sun that rises every morning, or the spring board from which we jump, daily, into an erratic physical and emotional sea. I'm thinking that resiliency must have something to do with the strength of our memory of that safe place, and the firmness of our belief that another will come.

The foundation for the basic circle formula will have to be so accessible, that cultural adaptations or deviations will enhance, not diminish, its purpose: While in circle, participants should feel as if they are simultaneously rocking and, being rocked in, a huge cradle. Attunement: that blissful rhythmic moment when all are moved by and moving to the same tempo; when action and reaction are evolving and dissolving, opening and closing, rising and falling, with out memory or anticipation. The experience of safety can only be assured in the "present moment." Breath flows in a circle from within to without, the continuum of dynamic reception to expression. The formula that wraps around this huge cradle of containment has a nice ring to it. It qualifies components necessary for attunement in movement/song circles; it also nicely rebuilds for trauma survivors, the assumptions which have been shattered. *SIMPLE- REPETITIVE—HARMONIOUS*. *Simple* movements and songs are easily mastered, boosting individual and collective self esteem. Each gesture/song is *repeated* in patterns of four with four beats to each phrase. Music creates patterns, and patterns by definition, repeat; What repeats is dependable. Three times feels to me like a completed act, and the forth time, a new beginning. When harmony in relationship is achieved, the sense of isolation is reduced. This communion

may be experienced in solitude while listening to music, or in affiliation while singing or moving with others to a common rhythm. This basic formula is laced with integrative and mirroring elements that enhance the sense of affiliation with, and attachment to, the self, the physical, social, and spiritual landscape. Gestures affirm humility, trust, and offering: Nurturing and nourishing simultaneously the spirit and the collective. Circumambulation is meditative and grounding. A shifting of visual focus from upward to outward encourages the visceral experience of spirit and substance.

“Place your hands gently upon your heart; feel the rise and fall of your chest, the life within you and around you. Open to the sky, filling with light. Bring that light gently to your heart...Gather, the circle of friends around you...Back to your heart with offering hands that extend out...and turn down, transforming that light and watering the earth...and rises to open the sky.....” This repeated movement sequence, the “Gesture Dance,” as it came to be called in the context of the CBI Opening Circle, was the granddaughter of the Boston State Hospital bell and the Day Care bird’s nest. She is mistaken for the “Dervish” by a Turkish participant, as he dances with her. I feel the hum of an archetype flowing through me; time spent immersed in constancy returns us all to the same water source.

Reclaiming Ancestral Songs and Healing Circles

Kathmandu, Nepal: 2005: “Circles of Sudanese child soldiers open their arms to the sky. From a distance their elders admonish them for participating in this “new religion brought by Americans.” Muslim religious leaders fear that we are teaching their children to pray to the Sun. The drumming and singing rituals which moved ancestral communities, have been ripped from the fabric of daily life.” Reports from the field. Our 2003 CBI trainees and interventionists, an ethnically eclectic group of 28, victims of civil war and torture are grouped together because of their common affliction. They have traveled from Afghanistan, Indonesia, Sudan, Burundi, Sri Lanka, and Eritrea, to share with us their successes and the concerns of their elders. I think of the Turkish man who experienced the “Dervish” in “opening” his arms “to the sun.” I think of the Sudanese elder, standing alone, watching the repetitive moving circle of children. My impulse is to welcome him into the circle. I sense his sadness, I imagine the lost traditions. If my “Gesture Dance” has some archetypal components, could it not move the body of this elder to recall his own cultural equivalent? The true cultural adaptation of this work reclaims lost ancestral songs and healing circles; the “new religion brought by the Americans” preaches a song of return: return to tradition, to circles of song and dance, to community, to the wisdom of the elders, and to Nature. These tribal cultures, aspiring toward the greener grass (Astro-turf?) of the modern world, need only to be reminded of the wealth of their own gardens.

Home 2006: I’m thinking of my reticence toward research. I acknowledge my disability to translate viscerally what I am told or shown. I figured this out years ago in dance classes: trying to interpret, with grace, movement sequences illustrated by teachers, was extremely difficult. On the other hand, closing my eyes and moving to inspired music,

produced a very different dancer. A ballet teacher who'd known me for many years as a student in his class, offered me a role in his ballet only after we danced together at a party. He remarked at the difference between the ballet class student and the party dancer. Improvising versus the reading of music to play it, creates a similar discrepancy: Right versus left brain processing. This discrepancy applies to my research phobia. I have been afraid that the observation of, the reading about, ritual, movement and song, might disable me. Just like in dance class. Submitting to some aspect of Nature's rhythm is necessary for attunement, for the participation in the enveloping experience of "Present Tense," for example, the process of giving birth, or of climbing a mountain. At the end of the journey, as one reaches the summit of the mountain, or the newborn takes his first breath, the participant becomes an observer. Internal becomes external. Balance requires that both exist in dynamic continuum: Ebb and flow, rise and fall, in and out. So, having been inside for so long, I knew it was time to step out and observe, to do the research. What I learned was validating rather than the anticipated, disabling. I found that what I called "my" formula, pre existed me, by at least five thousand years. One example could be found in the dance of Kwan Yin, the Japanese Holy Mother of Compassion. Reading about the sacred and the anthropological, enabled me to view the elemental components of my ritual circles, as well as the work of Isadora Duncan through the lens of the archetype. A cross time, culture and religion, I found the repetition of the following community building elements: circumambulation; movement chants with patterns of four beats and four repetitions; the physical and symbolic heart as the source of action and emotion; dynamic focal shifting of emphasis between the individual and the collective and consistent gestures which were viscerally symbolic of aspiration, nurturance and nourishment.

Transformation

Destructive to Constructive, Empowerment Over Threat

Jakarta, Indonesia: 2005: Tsunami. The sea circle swells. The earth body holds its breath. The pulse, of slow filling and silence, is cacophony to the animals: Climbing up and out, they anticipate the fishbowl which will soon replace their land. From mountains and trees they will observe the floating dead. They wonder why the humans do not follow them.

The survivors, victims of war and water, sit before me. The weight of their collective loss fills the room like smoke. Their stories of death, of bearing witness, and of survival draw me into the fishbowl. I see my dead family float by. It is too early to share these stories. I feel that we are all starting to drown. We begin again, this time with music, dance, and play. We remember the dry earth, the nourishment of laughter, the cradle of song.

These young Psychology students from the university in ACEH are the locals chosen to help the Indonesian children reclaim some sense of safety, calm, and empowerment. Eighty percent of their villages are lost. Afflicted, the body of their land dismembered, they seemed to remember wholeness in their ritual offerings of welcome, to us, the

American visitors. The smoke lifts, color returns to faces which had appeared, to me, as black and white. They giggle at themselves. They are once again the children that Tsunami took away. I watch their dance. I listen to their song: chant like harmonics which accompany line dances composed of flipping palms, hands that cross the heart and tap the body, prayer like kneeling and rising, body spins, gathering gestures, and chalice like offerings. The chalice spills its nectar into my dream tonight. I see the ACEH-nese dances transformed from lines of welcome to circles of empowerment. Their movements appear to me as elemental, nature's dance of survival: trees and mountains offer safety. Wings empower them with flight. Waves have the capacity to end or to initiate life. Tomorrow I will offer to them my adaptation. Tomorrow they will mirror each other with fluttering wings and swaying branches. They will feel the wind around them as they rhythmically shake the parachute. Their prayer like kneeling and rising will become the great wave that has overwhelmed them. They will laugh at my American body attempting toward Indonesian movement. This laughter will accompany the embodiment of flight and safety. Their empowered collective body will spiral out of a circular wave into its archetypal serpentine path, which is symbolic of the continuum of life and death. They will reclaim their hope as they viscerally experience the transformation of death to life.

Harmonic Resonance

Home, 2006: Returning to work with deaf children, I have come full circle. I remember the most basic, that which connects us all without judgment: Nature's rhythm. I seem to have gotten a bit lost as the world around me has grown. Back inside, we move our bodies and voices up and down repeating the octave pattern until all are part of the song. The song does not change. It sounds the same in every language and with every affliction. I am harmonizing, the third note of the chord, as I sing "Rock". A deaf girl stands beside me as we both hold scarf enshrouded dolls in our arms. The music wraps around us both as she hums the very same note.

Summary

Theoretical Framework Circles

The circle is symbolic of integration. Integrating emotion, spirit, cognition, and the physical is what we seek in the healing process. The physical circle is inclusive and equitable. Moving in a circular pattern is grounding and calming. Experiencing the continuum of life, the movement of the breath into and out of the body, the cycles of the moon and the tides, of birth, death and the spiritual return, is the metaphysical, symbolic circle. Encircling, the group contains stillness. Focus upon the contained stillness is collectively calming. Encircled, the individual experiences the boundaries of safety and inclusion, as inside and outside are defined. Visceral incorporation translates to the emotional body. As all life forms circle and spiral to a rhythm, participation in ritual circles, by dancing, singing and commemorating, encourages relationship to the biological and ancestral universe.

Incorporation

Nature's Body and Voice

Internalized Nature is the original designer. We understand harmony as we experience the inherent unity of all life forms. We know of truth and beauty as they mirror her original models. She provides, in her all encompassing acceptance, safety. When we sever our attachment to Nature, we experience a disconnection from our own bodies as well. We feel isolated and look for ugliness in ourselves and in the world around us. Our modern world, which places value upon technology, has helped us to forsake Nature. Reclaiming our bodies and understanding literally and symbolically how they are linked to the body of Nature is necessary for physical, emotional, social, and global healing. Here is an example of the visceral experience of Nature's Body: We imagine the body to be as a landscape. With the arms extended, we experience the horizon. Above is spirit, the heavens. Below is substance, the earth. Lightness and heaviness exist in our visual and kinesthetic focus above and below. Our palms extend from our hearts physically and symbolically to express, through gesture, our relationship with the world around us. Spirally around us, the Wind, the great Breath, sustains and supports the development of our muted voices. We are never alone, remembering our place in Nature.

Affiliation

Transforming Mob to Flock

A group of individuals, sharing and moving through the same environmental space, experience themselves, perceptually, as connected or isolated. This perception determines the manner in which they relate to the space and to each other. Birds in flight provide the metaphor for understanding this concept. Individuals in a Flock are attuned to one another, moving together with visual, auditory, and kinesthetic awareness. The Mob is composed of individuals who have no sensorial connection to each other.

Surrender

Affiliation and Solitude

The affiliation solitude paradigm is one of dynamic continuum. It refers to the most basic of all rhythms, the circadian rhythm, to which all life forms respond: Action-Rest-Action. Linear, calendar time works against this basic rhythm, against our biology, leaving "Rest" out of the sequence. Disease occurs, physically, socially and emotionally when the continuum is forsaken. Balance is achieved as the individual moves his focus between the external environment and the internal landscape. In affiliation, one joins and experiences; in solitude, one reflects upon the affiliative experience, selecting and internalizing components of that experience. This social dynamic may be experienced through the action rest continuum as follows:

- 1) The individual may affiliate (dancing, playing, interacting with others) during the action phase; solitude would occur, in this dynamic, during the rest phase.

2) The individual may experience solitude during the action phase, moving alone, at his own contemplative pace. Affiliation in this dynamic experience, would occur during the rest phase, as in traditional group “sharing.” Solitude, experienced as part of this vital continuum, must be distinguished from Isolation, which is defined as the state in which life forms are no longer vital.

Integration of Voice and Movement

The combining of descriptive present tense lyrics which rhythmic movement or gesture may have neurological, educational, and psychological advantages. Language is acquired more readily when expressed rhythmically. Using the analogy of the hologram, a multi-sensory experience will be recalled when cued by any of its components. For example, the integrated experience of moving in a circular pattern, holding onto the edge of a parachute with a group of peers, who all step, to a decided rhythm, singing: “Marching, marching, marching, marching”, will be remembered in the future by:

- 1) Hearing the song,
- 2) stepping to that beat, or
- 3) Holding the edge of a parachute.

Attunement may also be achieved as the voice and movements are integrated. Attunement contributes to the understanding of nonverbal cues and the appropriate responses to those cues. This is important developmentally and in terms of safety seeking and threat detection. Transformation and Resiliency The resilient human being is one who has a rich internal reservoir of creatively generated solutions. The creative process involves internal accessing and outward expressing. Transformation is a creative act, regardless of the format: Adults acquire and assume various roles in relation to the world around them. Children create changing stories as they play. As we continue to develop our creative minds, we are fueling our internalized reservoir of possibilities. When listening to music, visualization occurs in the mind’s eye. Facing opposition or threat, this resilient mind remembers past empowerment or mastery. This memory fuels the confidence needed to overcome future oppression. Resiliency is an internal process which is supported externally: Belief carried forward from achievement in the past creating hope for future success. The use of tools which are transformational assist children in maintaining their alert and creative minds. One example of such a tool is a simple piece of silk fabric. Fabric is easily transformed as it can be twisted, compacted, and shaped. It flows like a river, covers like a roof, hides like a scared rabbit, and can be worn as a hat, cape, or wings.

Attachment and Relationship

At Risk Children

Developmentally, attachment refers to the special bond formed in the infant, mother (primary caregiver) relationship. Globally, it is the capacity to form relationships. Positive attachment (sustained, responsive, consistent and supportive) provides the initial

experience of security and safety. Children who know this safety feel the competence necessary to explore and make relationships to their world. In this dyadic relationship, the mother is the mirroring self object; she directly regulates the infant's overt behavior and covert physiology. Disruption in attachment bonds contribute to imbalances in regulation of affect. There is a high relationship between disordered attachment and increased risk for violence and aggressive behaviors. These "At Risk" children have low self esteem, lack social empathy, and are unable to regulate their impulses. Aggressive behaviors which begin in preschool, are often symptoms of disordered attachment, and must be addressed in preschool. Disruptive behaviors remain stable over time and magnified, manifest as adolescent violence. As the number of infants attending full time day care programs increases, the opportunity for dyadic relationship building decreases. In the best of programs, these infants share a caregiver with three other infants. In the worst, they may share with twenty. This initial and competitive peer experience for these children may be the blueprint for future relationships. Peers become opponents rather than allies. Engaging in activities intended toward harmony may provide these children with an internalized social alternative. Body movements are children's most familiar means of expression and can be utilized to access collective expression. The richness of this expression will be amplified and validated if shared with the adult community.

Rainbowdance©, my program for preschool children, encourages this experience of collective harmony. The beginning ritual circle establishes a sense of containment, safety and empowerment as the children repeat weekly, a sequence of gesture accompanied songs which are easily mastered. The repetition creates trust and dependability. The mastery boosts self esteem. As the children work in circles, their movements are mirrored by their peers, creating a sense of affiliation, and decreases the sense of isolation which often accompanies early trauma or disordered attachment. The positive experience of moving together, rhythmically lulled by familiar music, contributes to the developing resource base from which children seek responses to social or emotional conflict. Dynamically moving between affiliation and solitude, the children are relating through dance and play then retreating to contemplate and internalize these interactions. The trusting peer group develops the competency needed to venture out into the world as explorers and as friends. The gross motor component of Rainbowdance© provides children with the symbolic journey into the world of Nature and relationship as they dance the movements of horses, lions and rabbits, and care for the vulnerable baby birds.

Following this adventure, children wind down to listen to a soothing story, which provides a smooth transition into the Ending Circle lullaby. Symbolically, children care for babies in the final segment, modeling the care they have received or aspire to receive. This posture promotes the reciprocity of giving and receiving. It encourages the growth of an empowered and self nurturing child.

Acute Trauma, Archetypes and Repetition

The trauma narrative must be expressed. It cannot be forced out. It can not be exorcized. The empowered survivor will share his story after the danger has passed, in his safe

place. Here, he will understand his survival; he will clarify his resources. One of his greatest resources is his peer group. Without a clear and determined safety ritual established, the trauma narrative will be prematurely forced to surface. This is the problem with many acute trauma interventions. A safety ritual established at the beginning of an intervention encourages peers to understand their collective as a resource. Acute trauma, like a perceptual knife, severs our psychic life line to the world and to the assumptions we held as basic: 1) I am worthy, 2) I am not alone, and 3) The world is dependable and will keep me safe. Experiencing safety is the necessary first step toward rebuilding these shattered assumptions and providing a foundation for psychological healing and reincorporation. A circle ritual designed to create safety and stability includes the following elements: 1) *Simple* movements accompanied by present tense lyrics integrating body and voice. Simplicity encourages mastery, which in turn, boosts self esteem. 2) *Attunement*, which gives participants the experience of moving harmoniously to a common rhythm. This minimizes the sense of isolation exaggerated by the traumatic event. 3) *Repetitive* sequences and patterns which create a sense of dependability. Musical tempos of 4:4 timing provide dependable rhythmic patterns. This format wrapped around archetypal content further encourages incorporation as participants experience their connections to each other, to their ancestors, and to the natural world.

Reclaiming Ancestral Songs and Healing Circles

Community healing rituals contain archetypal elements which may, in modern cultures, be forgotten. They can, however, be remembered. Providing the safety for communities to reclaim their ancestral circles of song and dance is salutogenic. Archetypal elements which has surfaced in my beginning circle rituals are as follows:

- 1) A movement pattern of circumambulation for meditation and grounding
- 2) Movement/chant in 4:4 timing repeated 4 times (“Hail Mary”)
- 3) The heart as physical/symbolic orientation: Breath flow, emotion
- 4) Alternating focus: Individual (whole) to group (individual as component)
- 5) Gathering/watering/planting movements symbolic of Nourishment
- 6) Soothing movements symbolic of Nurturance
- 7) Upward visual focus/physical aspiration: internal or spiritual processing.

Sharing my circle rituals with cultural communities has given me the opportunity to help them remember. As they experience the familiar, they are encouraged to reclaim their own forgotten songs and dances.

Transformation

Destructive to Constructive: Empowerment Over Threat

Traumatic events overwhelm survivors with a sense of impotence. They have become victims of forces which they were unable to control. The visceral symbolic experience of overwhelming, becoming, or controlling the oppressor may transform the perception of self from victim to empowered survivor. This transformation may also catalyze the creations which are born from what has been destroyed. In the case of the 2005 Tsunami, survivors reclaimed their sense of safety, in their dance of trees, birds, and mountains. They experienced empowerment as they took on the movements of the destructive forces of the wind and the sea. These movements, repeated in sequences of four, became the content for ritual safety circles.

Harmonic Resonance

The metaphorical and physical “lost voice” may be found. Neurological impairment, manifested as deafness, pulls the voice inward; external forces such as religious, emotional, or social oppression press upon the chest until the voice crashes in. Reclaiming voice establishes the individual’s lost expression of joy and relationship. Two or more people singing together are able to vibrate to the same tone under the proper conditions. Many repetitions of sung octaves may be one of these conditions. Tapping and vibrating the chest may encourage the release of a withheld voice. Varied notes, tones, tempos and intervals between notes evoke emotional states as the voice expresses them outward. When voices are attuned to one another, a gratifying sense of connection is achieved. It is possible for every individual, regardless of affliction, to find his voice and to resonate with the songs of the world. A world full of voices intended toward harmony will be a world that remembers Hope.

References

- Macy, R.D., Macy, D. J., Gross, S.I. & Brighton, P. (2003). "Healing in familiar settings: Support for children and youth in the classroom and community." In R.D. Macy, S. Barry & G.G. Noam (Eds.), *New directions for youth development: Theory, practice, research* (pp. 51-79). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.