

DYNAMICS OF HUMAN MOVEMENT

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DANCE MOVEMENT THERAPY FROM AN INDIAN DANCE PERSPECTIVE

This paper was inspired by an Indian and Bollywood dance workshop I conducted for children between the ages of 5 to 12 years at Brentwood Primary school. The students as well as the teachers who participated responded enthusiastically during the sessions despite the fact that there were at least another 30 activities planned for the students as part of their annual school Cultural Day. There were 40 children in each session that lasted for 45 mins after which the children were led by their teachers to the next activity. There were three main components to each session- we would start with a chanting exercise followed by a balancing game that was lead into movement explorations which were progressively built on to form a dance. At the end of the day, the last group of children showed the rest of the school what they had learnt in the session in an informal performance. The teachers later commented on how impressed they were with the amount the children were able to accomplish during the Indian dance session as well as how they personally "felt really good" after participating in it. I had loosely referred to the Laban dimensional framework while doing the choreography of the session but had not looked at all the movements in detail. The positive feedback I received prompted me to look more closely at the efforts and shapes of the movements explored in the session as well as their significance and influence on the physical and psychic well being of an individual. The effort is the amount of energy exerted in the movement that has an outer visible aspect which represents the mover's inner attitude towards the movement. " Laban sometimes referred to these factors as the how, what, when and where of movement; his " how" refers to the way the movement flows, what to the weight factor, " when" to time, and " where" to space." (Dell, 1970, p. 31). As the movements flow they produce changes in the shapes formed by the body, as the mover uses different efforts to complete an action.

In describing the movements of the session it is impossible to separate them from the history and philosophies of thinking that are inherent in all Indian dance forms, which are derivatives of the many Classical Indian Dance styles.

Some of these were used in story form to expose the children to some aspects of the Indian culture as well as to increase expressiveness and provide meaning to the movements. In the words of L. S. Ramaswamy Sastri, Indian dance is not mere activity of the human limbs resulting from rhythmic activity but “ the embodied soul's attempt to express not only through the mind or the senses alone...but through the mind and the senses and the body acting together, its nature and its visions. The whole body becomes so expressive that one might almost say the body thought." (Sorrel, 1967, p. 52). Each part of the body has its own dance and the eyes, face, head, hands, trunk, chest, waist, torso, arms, ankles and feet are used independently and in tandem to produce highly expressive dances. There are seven different types of Classical Indian dance that have different styles and very little overlap, however there are certain recurring features that form the basis for Bollywood dance. This paper explores some of these features as well as breathing techniques that are yoga based in terms of the changes in body shape and their corresponding effects on the individual. By changing the focus to that of inner exploration and expression, some of these may be adapted for use in Dance Movement Therapy to increase the range of movement and develop a vocabulary of expressive movement while bringing about greater awareness of the body and its potentials.

1. CHANTING “ Aum” : A BREATHING EXERCISE

Each session started with a breathing exercise that involved taking in a deep breath and exhaling slowly making the sound “ Aum” . The aim was to use the breath to expand the body while simultaneously engaging the voice. Using the basic breathing pattern of a deep, sustained inhalation followed by an equally long and sustained exhalation with the chanting of Aum, small gestural movements of the wrists, hands and arms were added. It is customary to chant and pray to the Gods prior to any movement or music explorations. This concept was adapted into an opening ritual where we showed our respect to each other and ourselves as well as the cosmic spirit. A vertical, arc like gesture in the near reach space with the thumbs pointing to the shoulders concentrates the vibrations of sound in the shoulders and torso. On the next inhalation the arms spread outward in a horizontal, opening gesture as we traced a circular path in the intermediate reach space followed by a closing on exhalation and finally ended by bending down and touching the floor with our palms, paying respect to the earth under our feet and rising to finish.

There are three different components to this exercise- breathing techniques; gesture and posture; voice. For the purpose of this workshop, this exercise was designed to channel the energies of the excited children more positively and engage them physically and fully in the activity. Hence it was quite directive with a story interwoven through the movements to help hold the groups attention. However, different permutations and combinations of these three features along with varying degrees of prescription may result in a completely different effect. In the presentation component of this course a less directive approach was used to explore some of these concepts in a group oriented dance therapy context and may be applied in any group where the aims include increasing the vocabulary of expressive movements, awareness of self and developing confidence and self esteem.

A] Breathing Techniques:

The breath is the source of life, there is no life if there is no breath.“ The most basic model for shape flow, when it is seen as growing and shrinking, is the inflation and deflation of the trunk in breathing.” (Dell, 1970, p. 45) As the body expands and contracts with the breath there is a change in the position and relationship of body parts as the inner as well as outer or external spaces undergo some change. There are many different traditional Indian breathing techniques or *Pranayama* that are aimed at establishing healthy breathing rhythms and stress on developing an understanding of the complete breath. The complete breath is not just deep breathing; it is the deepest possible breathing that involves the entire respiratory system. According to ancient Yoga techniques, the complete breath is a combination of high, mid and low breathing. Here high breathing refers to what takes place primarily in the upper part of the chest and lungs and results in a naturally shallow breathing pattern. “ This has been called clavicular breathing or collarbone breathing and involves raising the ribs, collarbone and shoulders.” *¹. Mid breathing is when the middle parts of the lungs are engaged while in low or abdominal breathing the diaphragm is engaged as the stomach bulges out and hollows in. This roughly coincides with the concept of three dimensional breathing where the lower regions of the torso bulge and hollow in the sagittal dimension, the middle regions widen and narrow in the horizontal while the upper regions lengthen and shorten with each breath.

“ It is one of the basic pre-suppositions of yoga that the breath (prana) and the mind (chitta) are not separate or independent of each other. They are, in fact, considered to be two different expressions of one single basic entity.” (Joshi, 2000, p. 5) The breath is essential for our very existence and the mind

is necessary for relationships within our world, reactions to the environment and all life processes. Developing a control over the breath helps to still the mind, through various meditation techniques and individuals may gradually learn to maintain an inward gaze and greater control of the mind.“ Yogis control the breath in order to have peace of mind (chittashanti).” (Joshi, 2000, p. 6) A deep and full breathing rhythm promotes a deeper and fuller approach to life. In addition, “ A breathing pattern which is full and continuous, without holding promotes the flow of shape changes in the body.” (Dell, 1970, p. 45) As Bartenieff (1980) concludes, movement rides on the flow of breath; consequently a healthy breathing pattern that flows freely through the body not only sends more oxygen to the cells but also prepares the body and mind for further movement explorations. The breath or *prana* flows through the body activating and energizing the different parts in preparation for further activity. The various breathing techniques and exercises help bring the focus of attention on the flow of life energy or *prana* as it travels through the body as well as an awareness of the subtle changes that occur in the inner as well as outer spaces of the body. It is an exercise in indirect or internal focus. Tensions and holding patterns may be brought into awareness and consciously released through relaxation techniques based on the flow of breath incorporating the concept of prana. Making the spine and back the focus of breathing heightens awareness of the three dimensionality of the human body and the subtle movements of the back as we breathe. These techniques further deepen the individuals’ awareness of different regions of the body that enables the individual to discern the superficial tensions from the deep, underlying patterns of holding. Not only do these tensions restrict the movements and flow of prana but “ Holding in any part of the thoracic cavity affects the flow of blood and oxygen in the body.” (Reading material handed out on 07/04/06 for this course: Breathing). The article also talks about how the whole spine should move when we breathe, all the way to the coccyx or in other words the whole body is engaged in the shape flow of breathing.

“ This growing-shrinking process-inwardly felt and outwardly visible-also heightens awareness of the centre of the body around which the process revolves.” (Bartenieff & Lewis, 1980, p.232) As the body expands and contracts we become aware of the central core of our body around which these activities are taking place. We become connected with our centre of gravity and experience a sense of balance and connectedness. Shape flow and, in particular, bipolar shape flow there is a symmetrical expansion and contraction of the body which encourages an internal sense of stability and balance. Bipolar growing brings about feelings of fullness and satisfaction that are related to being comfortable in the environment while the corresponding shrinking and going inward is necessary to reconnect with the inner self. One must be able to expand and grow towards objects to explore them as well as bring them closer

by shrinking for closer inspection. In a group context growing and shrinking develops through the shared breathing rhythm that seem to concentrate the energy in the space. “ Through adjustment to the shape flow pattern of other persons one can create a sense of trust, a feeling that there is a structure upon which one can rely.” (Amighi, Loman, Lewis and Sossin, 1999, p. 110) The shared rhythm builds on these feelings of trust that enables further movement explorations and expression. It encourages the development of harmonious group interactions and individual explorations. In addition, “ Without the shape flow, the emotional component is minimized and the movement looks more mechanical.” (Amighi, Loman, Lewis and Sossin, 1999, p. 153) In the workshop, the breathing exercise was effectively a physical and emotional warm up that engaged the mind, body and soul of the highly excited children.

B] Voice:

The growing and shrinking of the body may be emphasised by the use of the voice. “ Making sounds, when lying or sitting or standing, reinforces the awareness of the stream or breath supporting the straightening or rounding of the different segments of the spine in all positions and levels” (Bartenieff & Lewis, 1980, p. 232). The sound vibrates in the inner body spaces of the abdomen, pubic region, chest and mouth emphasizing the subtle changes that take place as the outer air rushes in to fill the vacuum created by the downward movement of the diaphragm which then releases to expel the air in the out breath. According to ancient Indian philosophies, Aum is a manifestation in sound of the cosmic spirit and each letter of the word has a different vibration which is sequentially sent through the body. Each letter generates a different frequency that reverberates through the body and often produces feelings of calmness and peace. However, making any sound and using the voice is often an empowering experience in itself. “ Voice is an indicator of self. Speaking one’ s feelings and thoughts is part of creating, maintaining, and recreating one’ s authentic self.” (Simons, 1994, p. 3) Using one's voice is often an extremely validating experience of self and combining it with a movement component encourages whole hearted participation and focus on the activity.

C] Gesture and Posture:

In Indian and Bollywood dance, hands and facial gestures serve the dual purpose of transmitting the meaning of words as well as acting as a unit to describe emotion. The eyes, facial expressions, head, hands, chest, hips and feet are used extensively in gestures and postures to communicate different moods and feelings. There are over four thousand different single and double handed gestures that utilize the fingers like they are the eyes, the palm like it is

the face, the wrist like it is the neck and the whole arm like it is the body of the dancer. Hand gestures may be in the near, intermediate or far reach space, engaging the entire arm, wrist and hand in the movements. “ Gestures draw on the ability to functionally isolate body parts.” (Amighi, Loman, Lewis and Sossin, 1999, p. 101) In a gesture one part of the body is engaged in movement while in postures the whole body is involved in the action. Both posture and gesture are equally important in every day functioning as some activities require the participation of the whole body while others may be better served with the movement of only certain parts. By including a hand gesture in the breathing exercise, the whole arm is encouraged to participate and engage in the movements to encourage three dimensional shaping. Three gestures were added in the workshop– the first was with the arms rising and sinking with the palms opening and closing with the in breath and out breath respectively to emphasize the lengthening and shortening of the body. The second was a horizontal spreading of the arms in the intermediate reach space with the fingers spread out and out stretched along with widening and narrowing and lastly a sagittal gesture with the palms flexing downwards to stress the bulging and hollowing of the torso. These extended the growing and shrinking of the body parts into shaping in planes

2. DANCING SHIVA: AN EXERCISE IN BALANCE

The aim in Indian dance is to take the emotions of the gestures into the whole body so the entire being resonates with expression. According to Kestenberg and the KMP system “ when a person moves her entire body in an integrated way using an effort quality, this is termed “ an integrated posture in efforts” .” (Amighi, Loman, Lewis and Sossin, 1999, p. 101) These postures are generally asymmetrical since one part of the body acts while another part supports the action and requires a degree of co ordination and balance. This was the basis of the next exercise which was a traditional pose of the Lord of dance called Shiva whose dance symbolizes the eternal cycle of creation and destruction. We called the pose the “ Dancing Shiva” (*Nataraja*) – the arms make a closed shape across the body in the horizontal dimension to the left with one palm facing up in a flexed position while the other wrist is flopped with the palm facing down, simultaneously the right leg moves across the body and is held in a bent position in the horizontal plane which causes a twist in the waist as the left leg tries to support the lop sided weight. Every time I said Dancing Shiva the children had to quickly strike the pose and balance themselves on one leg. It brought instant calm into the room where a minute earlier they were

almost in chaos! “ Postures imply whole-hearted emotional and cognitive involvement.” (Amighi, Loman, Lewis and Sossin, 1999, p. 101) During the workshop, this game was employed as a safety net incase the children got too distracted or agitated or whenever the noise levels got too loud I would call out “ Dancing Shiva” and the children would immediately be engrossed in trying to sweep into this pose and hold the indirectness and strength in their bodies as they tried to maintain their balance and look serenely on like little Gods. Here too, the use of a specific hand gesture extended the sense of energy and aliveness into the hands. The hands and fingers are often forgotten or neglected parts of the body that have innumerable functions but are rarely explored for their expressive potential. This is an essential characteristic of all Indian dance forms that can be used to expand an individuals’ awareness of her arms to the tips of her fingers as well as to emphasize the shape flow and shaping as in the previous examples and the dimensions of the movements as in the description that follows.

3. Indian and Bollywood Dance Movements

Indian dance has it's origins in storytelling and drama. The Classical forms of dance were established to communicate and share divine love through music, dance and drama that are traditionally inseparable. Posture and gesture are used extensively and expressively to convey meaning and emotion as the dancer tells her story through her eyes, facial expressions, head, chest, waist, hips, hands and feet. The dances are highly symbolic as every movement and gesture has a deeper meaning and tells a story of their own. I improvised a story of the butterfly and the flowers to correspond with one closed hand gesture and an open hand gesture respectively. The story helped to increase the range and expressiveness of the movements. The butterfly (index and middle fingers touch the thumb while the ring and little finger stretch open) flew out into the horizontal, vertical and sagittal planes leaving a circular trace form as the arm reached the farthest point of the reach space to find a flower, the fingers open and stretch out in the corresponding hand gesture. “ The limits of the far reach are the limits of what Laban called the personal kinesphere, i.e., the space around the body which can be reached without taking a step.” (Dell, 1970, p. 47) These limits were accessed in this expressive manner as the hand led the rest of the body successively through arc like directional movements in all the dimensions creating alternate open and closed shapes as the butterfly flew out and came back in towards the body. Since there was a limited amount of time for each session, these movements allowed the body to stretch and warm up while simultaneously balancing open and closed shapes and movements in all the dimensional planes. “ Anatomically speaking, shaping

requires the constant blending of the muscle group function in the many joints to allow the body's fullest participation.” (Dell, 1970, p. 55) The whole body reaches out in a direction with maximum movements around the joints, engaging the muscles of the whole body including the face and eyes that follow the movements of the hands. Movements are often initiated by the hands, elbows, hips and shoulders.

There are three main aspects of Indian dance– Nritya or the expressional aspect, Nritta or pure dance consisting of decorative and aesthetic poses and Natya or the dramatic elements which includes the spoken word. Nritya combines expressions through facial and body gestures with rhythmic patterns of the feet that follow the sounds of the music. The stamping of the feet is often made audible in traditional performances as the dancers wear bells around their ankles to emphasize this rhythmic aspect of Indian dance. This requires a shifting of weight as the feet stamp the floor and give most forms their characteristic verticality and emphasis on weight. It involves the co ordination of the upper and lower body as well as strength for their correct execution. Thus the lower body is often maintaining the rhythm through strong, sudden or sustained stamping and shifting of weight while the upper body is used with different attitudes towards weight and time.

There are two main styles of movements based on the manner of execution. The first is *Tandava* or the masculine elements that are expressed in primarily bold and heroic movements. These are strong, sudden and direct movements while *Lasya* or the feminine elements consist of soft and graceful postures and gestures that are light, indirect and sustained. Both styles may be performed by a male or female dancer and require gradual, even, abrupt changes of tension flow as well as flow fluctuations to control the expressiveness of the movements of the upper body while balancing the stamping of the feet in the lower body. Combining all three aspects of Indian dance produces a complex sequence of movements while actively shaping in planes and accessing the dimensions. "Shaping in planes creates the structure for more complex relationships and meaning; shaping is about relationships, about how parts are interconnected." (Amighi, Loman, Lewis and Sossin, 1999, p. 161)

CONCLUSION

"Human movement is intentional. Actions are guided and purposeful, and the intentions of the mover are made clear by the way in which the person moves." (Moore & Yamamoto, 1988, p. 185)

"Both the psychotic patient and the dancer make use of symbolic body action to communicate emotions and ideas that defy everyday use of language." (Deldon Anne Mcneely, 1987, p. 46).

By its very nature, dance is the most immediate, economical, direct form of healthy exercise and expression. Reflecting on the workshop and analyzing the outcomes has shown that individuals can expand their expressive movement vocabulary by trying out different styles and forms of movement/ dance that temporarily allow them to access combinations of efforts and shapes that are new and unfamiliar. As Bartenieff puts it " What is important is to reawaken your awareness of muscles and joints that are not used, used inadequately or misused so that you can extend your movement possibilities in both energy and expressiveness" (Bartenieff & Lewis, 1980, p. 230).

Indian dance and traditional breathing techniques provide a unique approach to increasing the expressive potential and awareness of whole body. The progression from shape flow to more complex shaping in planes and directional movements in the workshop had a positive effect on the children who were fully engaged and able to accomplish a lot during our session. The use of the Dancing Shiva pose to actively change the quality of weight, spatial attention and attitude towards time all at once, required concentration and active participation that in this case lead to a shift in the focus of the children that allowed them to stop and pause while they found their balance.

Using the Laban framework I was able to balance the movements in all three planes making full use of the kinaeshpere, utilized posture and gesture and a range of efforts and shapes. "The availability of a full range of efforts in a person's movement repertoire indicates that the person is able to effectively cope with environmental challenges." (Amighi, Loman & Lewis, Sossin, 1999, p. 89) Consequently, developing a full range of efforts allows individuals to respond creatively in different situations without needing to fall back into old patterns of responding that may be inappropriate or restrictive.

Laban Movement Analysis provides a language to describe, break down and analyse ways of moving. In the therapeutic context, it can also provide a framework to bring this information into conscious awareness through movement reflection and integration. We can look at the characteristic movement patterns and ways of moving through life in terms of the individuals' attitude towards weight, space, time and bring these into conscious awareness through Dance Movement Therapy. An individual can explore their specific style of moving in a therapeutic session through

conscious movement explorations that reveal the weight, space, time, flow and shapes made by her body. Kestenberg refers to changes in flow factor as affording control over oneself, over the changes in tension in one's own body, while changes concentrated on weight, space and time afford control within the environment (Dell, 1970, p. 32). The efforts and shapes of our movements thus reflect our unique way of coping with the environment and relating to objects and individuals in space. Specific movement interventions may be designed with the help of LMA to introduce new ways of moving or in response to habituated or fixed patterns and ways of responding, that extend the range of movement possibilities and develop the individuals' creative intelligence.

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