

DEVELOPING RESILIENCY, AFFILIATION, AND THE SUSTAINED “INNER VOICE” USING THE PROPHECY OF ISADORA DUNCAN

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Isadora Duncan, called the “Mother of Modern Dance”, expressed a theory of continuous movement that included sensitivity to the flow of energy into and out of the body, literally and metaphorically. In search of movement which was the expression of the human spirit, she developed a technique which: 1) glorified natural movement, 2) using ritual and mythological archetypes, traced dance to its sacred roots and 3) linked all life forms, rhythmically and emotionally.

The presenter, a movement therapist and a Duncan lineage holder, has attempted, by working with diverse populations (Brain Damaged, Physically and Emotionally Impaired, Traumatized, Blind, Deaf) to discover a source of affiliation, which knows no class distinction, impairment, or ability. The Duncan prophecy, her source of creative inspiration, has provided the architecture for containment in her treatment methodology; The tradition: 1) glorifies all life forms as inherently affiliative; 2) encourages the development of self esteem, social empathy, and self regulation; 3) helps to create integration as symbol and reality are experienced simultaneously; and 4) through the use of rhythm, enhances dependability and trust in the self, the social and the physical environment.

The workshop will attempt to illustrate experientially and didactically, how the Duncan vision has been adapted to the following movement therapy work:

- 1) Violence Prevention for Pre School Populations

- 2) Psychological Recovery/ Return to Normalcy from exposure to Traumatic events
- 3) The development of affiliation in Isolated Populations (Developmentally Delayed, Handicapped, Traumatized)
- 4) Exploring relationship, developing and sustaining the “Inner voice”.

Isadora Duncan, the Mother of Modern Dance, was also a great dance therapist. Seeking a true movement art form inspired by the soul and reflected in the simultaneously simple and complex patterns of nature, she felt that all great art was spiritual, religious: “Art which is not religious is not art, it is mere merchandise”. (Duncan 1928) Her vision was one of holism, of harmony, of community, of affiliation. As in nature, she understood an individual to be simultaneously complete and part of a bigger whole; never alone, an individual is dynamically and spiritually woven into the fabric of his natural environment, into the greater physical and spiritual reality. As in Dance Movement Therapy, her legacy tells us that rhythmic movement is (neurologically) more primitive than thought and verbalization, and therefore is the form of communication which links all people regardless of age, time, disability or cultural background to all life forms:

“It is far back, deep down the centuries, that one has to pass when Isadora Duncan dances; back to the very morning of the world, when the greatness of the soul found free expression in the beauty of the body, when rhythm of motion corresponded with the rhythm of sound, when the movements of the human body were one with the wind and the sea, when the gesture of a woman’s arm was as the unfolding of a rose petal, the pressure of her foot upon the sod as the drifting of a leaf to the earth. When all the fervor of religion, of love, of patriotism, sacrifice or passion expressed itself to the measure of the harp or timbrel, when men and

women danced before their hearthstones and their gods in religious ecstasy, or out in the forests and by the sea because of the joy of the life that was in them; it had to be that every great, strong or good impulse of the human soul poured from the spirit to the body in perfect accord within the rhythm of the Universe”. (Duncan 1927).

This sounds very lovely, but how, one might ask, does this translate into modern times, into the therapy and healing, which is so needed in our modern world? As a lineage holder in the Duncan tradition (having studied with one of Isadora’s protégés from the age of 4), and an Expressive therapist, whose work is rooted in movement and rhythm, I believe I understand, and perhaps have helped to develop a translation. The didactic component of this Workshop will be a presentation of this translation, supported by musical references, movement illustrations by Duncan dancers, as well as videos . As therapists, I believe that we all can agree that “everyman”, all the disabled, disadvantaged, traumatized, emotionally or physically needy, experience isolation in some form. Our society contributes to this sense of isolation, moving us further and further from nature and its inspiration, teaching us to compete with each other and with the Universe; modeling competition as a winning style and being alone “at the top”, as the coveted place. Somehow we have forgotten that living creatures, from the smallest atom to a human being, die when placed too long in isolation (physical, emotional or imagined). If we are able, in our work, to reduce this sense of isolation, to enable our clients to experience a true sense of connection, the healing process has begun. The foundation of the Duncan tradition is affiliation: within oneself, with the social and physical environment, with the living Universe, through all time, without end.

The belief that affiliation is possible is, in itself, healing; to participate in or to observe the beautiful Duncan movement vignettes, transforms our experience of our world and ourselves. The movements and gestures of this tradition inspired by and in response to classical music, evoke emotional states which may promote healing; The physical and symbolic circle is one of the building blocks in the architecture of this work: In the physical circle everyone is equal and included; moving in a circular pattern is grounding and calming; experiencing the continuum of life, the movement of breath in and out of the body, the cycles of the moon and the tides, of birth and death and spiritual return, is the metaphysical, symbolic circle. The circle is symbolic of integration; integration of emotion, spirit, cognition, and the physical is what we seek in the healing process.

The Duncan tradition, in my interpretation, seeks to find a balance, to create a continuum, an unending circle between affiliation and solitude. In affiliation, we join and experience; in solitude we reflect upon our experience, selecting and internalizing components of that experience, which contribute to the developing personality. This necessary balance between solitude and affiliation can be found in most every Duncan dance; it is a relationship, which greatly contributes to the development of resiliency (internalized solutions, expanded repertoire of emotions, self regulation). The dynamic relationship between affiliation and solitude is explored through the continuum of action and rest. Balance may be achieved in two different ways; the individual may affiliate, (dancing, playing or interacting with others) during the action phase; rest would occur in this dynamic during the solitude phase. On the other hand, the individual may find solitude during the action phase, moving alone, at his own pace, in his movement pursuit; the affiliation in this

dynamic would occur during the rest phase, as in traditional group “sharing”. In this work we discover the distinction between “isolation”, an unhealthy condition, and “solitude”, a necessary component of the dynamic life continuum.

The Experiential component of this Workshop will provide a framework for participating in adaptations for the following: 1) Violence Prevention/Resiliency Building with Preschoolers, 2) Development of Affiliation in Isolated Populations: Mentally Retarded, Physically and Emotionally Impaired, 3) Psychological Recovery from Exposure to Traumatic Events, and 4) Exploring Relationship, Developing and Sustaining the Inner Voice (for Normal Children). Each adaptation has a very precise and determined structure; The Violence Prevention and the Psychological Recovery interventions have been measured in terms of their efficacy and have proven successful in accomplishing the sought after goals: The Violence Prevention program sought to increase the following in Under privileged Preschool populations: 1) Self esteem, 2) Social Empathy, and 3) Self regulation. The Psychological Recovery from Exposure to Traumatic Events Intervention was successfully implemented in Turkey following the recent earthquakes there. The program was implemented in the schools with children aged 5-18, and sought to reduce the normal symptoms of trauma following exposure: there was a significant reduction in somatic symptoms, avoidance, and anxiety, and an increase in self esteem, positive school behavior, and the renewed sense of hope for the future.

Regardless of population or intended outcome, all of this work has in common, structurally, a “Beginning Circle”, a ritual that by nature, repeats every time the group meets. This repetition

helps to create a sense of safety and stability for the individual and for the group; this dependability fosters the growth of trust, which is necessary for anything else to happen, be it therapeutic, creative, or both. Within the beginning circle, the content must be: 1) simple, so that mastery and the development of self esteem may occur, 2) repetitive, so that dependability and consequent trust may evolve, and 3) harmonious, so that the participants will feel connected with the music, with each other, reducing the sense of isolation within and without. The Circle is followed by a “Central Activity” which may, in the case of trauma work, or resiliency building, be a “Narrative”. This narrative may be a Psychodramatic exercise, a visual art description, a movement improvisation, or a cooperative play activity.

In traditional Duncan dance classes, where the varied nature of relationship is explored, and the “Inner Voice” (the ability to remember, to be inspired, and to call upon one’s strength to overcome hardship and obstacles) is sustained, the following are woven into the fabric of experience and discovery: 1) The continuum of life’s openings and closings (expansion/contraction); 2) Participation in transitions as empowerment, easing the flow between the familiar past and the unknown future; 3) Nonverbal cueing; 4) Attention and focus as affiliation and intention; 5) Flock versus Mob movement patterning/ the power of Affiliation without aggression; 6) the experience of moving between the roles of “Leader” and “Follower”; and 7) the ever present experience of affiliation with all living creatures and forces, through rhythm.