

ECArTE
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Conference
11-14 September 2024

Singing in the Dark Times:
creation and resistance in the
Arts Therapies

Presentation:

**Dance Movement Psychotherapy Large
Group as critical pedagogy in Higher
Education:**

professional arts therapies training through
experiential embodied learning.

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13th September 2024: 2.45pm-4.15pm

Immediate context for our
Dance Movement
Psychotherapy (DMP)
Large Group research

Goldsmiths, University of London

Department of Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies
(STACS)

MA in Dance Movement Psychotherapy (MADMP) Programme

Research team:



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Context

MA in Dance Movement Psychotherapy (MADMP) programme at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Emphasis on experiential learning that takes place in small, medium and large groups.

DMPLG occurs twice a term, i.e. 6 times per academic year for 90 minutes engaging in co-created process

MA DMP at Goldsmiths has been running since the year 2000, representing 24 years .i.e. in total, there have been 132 events!

Interruptions to this rhythm such as University strike actions and when the pandemic struck we temporarily abandoned face to face teaching and learning. Initially, we did not consider online platforms suitable for the DMPLG, but changed our perspective on this as the pandemic unfolded.

Students are assessed on this element by a submission in which they need to write reflectively about the DMPLG as part of their experiential learning process.



Values and principles

Experiential group work runs counter-culture to dominant educational practices in Higher Education (HE) with the focus on individual achievement, target orientated, tangible outcomes and methods of teaching and learning driven by the marketisation of HE (Skaife et al 2020, Skaife, Jones & Pentaris 2016, Woodger, Thompson & Anastasio 2019).

The values and principles of the psychodynamically informed Large Group processes operate in opposition to dominant educational practices and instrumental methods designed to fit an educational marketplace.



Dark times as a context for the preparation of this presentation:

WIDER CONTEXT

Austerity. Brexit. Marketisation of HE. #MeToo. BLM.
Covid-19 pandemic. Environmental breakdown. Refugee Crisis.
War.

Weathering a transformation programme in HEI in the UK. Losing colleagues: standing in solidarity

Standing firm on Professional and ethical values

The importance of Large group as a thinking apparatus

Large Group as a
symbolic community
performance

...an experiential
learning model (use
of reflections)

WHAT IS LARGE GROUP?

The DMPLG operates at the interface of the small and medium experiential and supervision groups and the wider university community. Skaife and Jones (2008) note how the conception of Large Group is an important part of this wider dynamic matrix, standing at 'the interface between college and the wider community and the smaller groups in the programme and clinical work' (201) and as such operates as a learning experience across micro, mezzo and macro levels. The social and political issues that arise from the DMPLG are thus relevant to a wider network of health and social care professionals.

WHAT DOES LARGE GROUP LOOK LIKE?

Staff preparation

Non-directive, without a preconceived agenda.

Consistent structure and an evolving culture over time.

A 'theatrical space' (Skaife, Jones and Penatris 2016: 24) in which the movement processes, that will sometimes include witnessing and spoken language, is followed by a space of verbal reflection, unlike the ATLG in which verbalising, art-making and movement around the space happen simultaneously (Skaife, Jones & Pentaris 2016).

Participants of DMPLG move with, in and through immediate power relations, that cannot be separated from wider social, cultural and political inscriptions and groupings.



Conceptualising
the research

Data collection
through practice-led
fieldwork across an
academic year.

Practice-led research. New
materialist/posthumanist (Frizell 2024): thinking
outside the box

Inquiry into staff experience

Research team liaison meetings x 4:
via movement, mark-making, creative writing and
discussion

Pre and post Large group email provocations x 6
across an academic year

Inquiry into alumni experience

Focus group inquiry x 2:
via movement, mark-making, creative writing and
discussion

We gathered as a research team and responded to the following provocations with movement, mark-making and creative writing.

Research team liaison meetings x 4:

via movement, mark-making, creative writing, discussion.

- What are the wider social, cultural, political etc issues currently in your orbit?

Think media/politics/culture/society etc.

- What are the immediate personal issues that are currently in your orbit of experience?

Think health, emotional wellbeing, finance, family, work, etc.

Bringing together a busy team. Colleagues as practitioners; professional development. Practice-based research skills. Critical pedagogy. Collective vision.

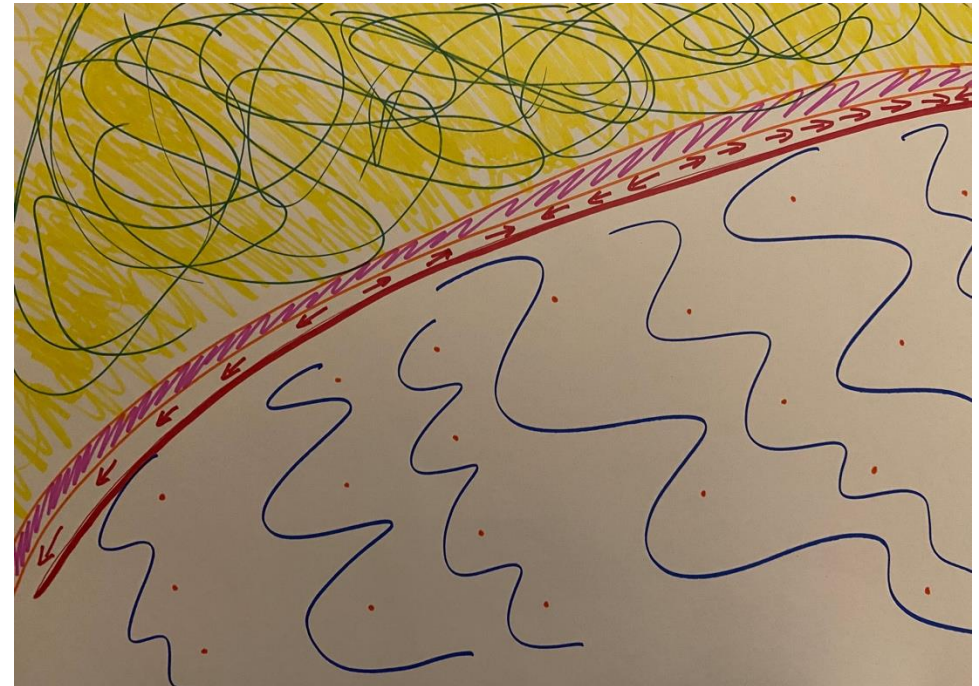
RESEARCH LIAISON MEETING

In the movements, I felt very free and present. I was working with efforts in my movement phrases including slashing and flicking pushing and pulling movements etc. At one stage, I shut the light for fear someone across might overlook and see me moving. (lol)

The art shows my wish to work with being in the moment and needing a structure; and working with my dominant hand vs non dominant hand in the drawing.

My reflections hearing others' response came to mind about large group

- Holding the tension between been seen or not.*
- Showing vulnerability and protecting it.*
- working with structure or no structure*
- allowing the mind to freely associated or finding some sort of a rule book on how to be in large group.*



RESEARCH LIAISON MEETING



I entered the movement space and found myself sinking to the floor. My hands pushed into the floor, fingers turned inwards, elbows out and my spine straightened. Agnes' words came back to me. 'It's sometimes a lion. Not always a dragon.' I held a lion-like position and looked around the room, feeling the strength in my spine. Gradually twisting to the right and then the left, my gaze scanned the room, slowly. My hands padded on the carpeted floor. Pushing my hips forwards, my chest lowered towards the ground and my body swayed side to side, my elbows creating a horizontal line across my back. Pushing back onto my feet, I gradually rose to a standing position. Opening my arms and continuing to spiral around. I caught sight of a neighbour's window out of my window and felt the inhibition of fearing that I was being watched.

As I came to the paper, I took a yellow oil pastel and began to draw the snake-like pattern of a long cloth, with the head of an animal at one end. Feet beneath indicated that this snake-like animal was being supported by humans, under the cloth. A banner stood in the corner of the page. RESPECT it said.

I thought of the outsider looking in; judging what was happening without knowing the full story. Did I need to justify this creative process as productive in some way, or was it differently productive?

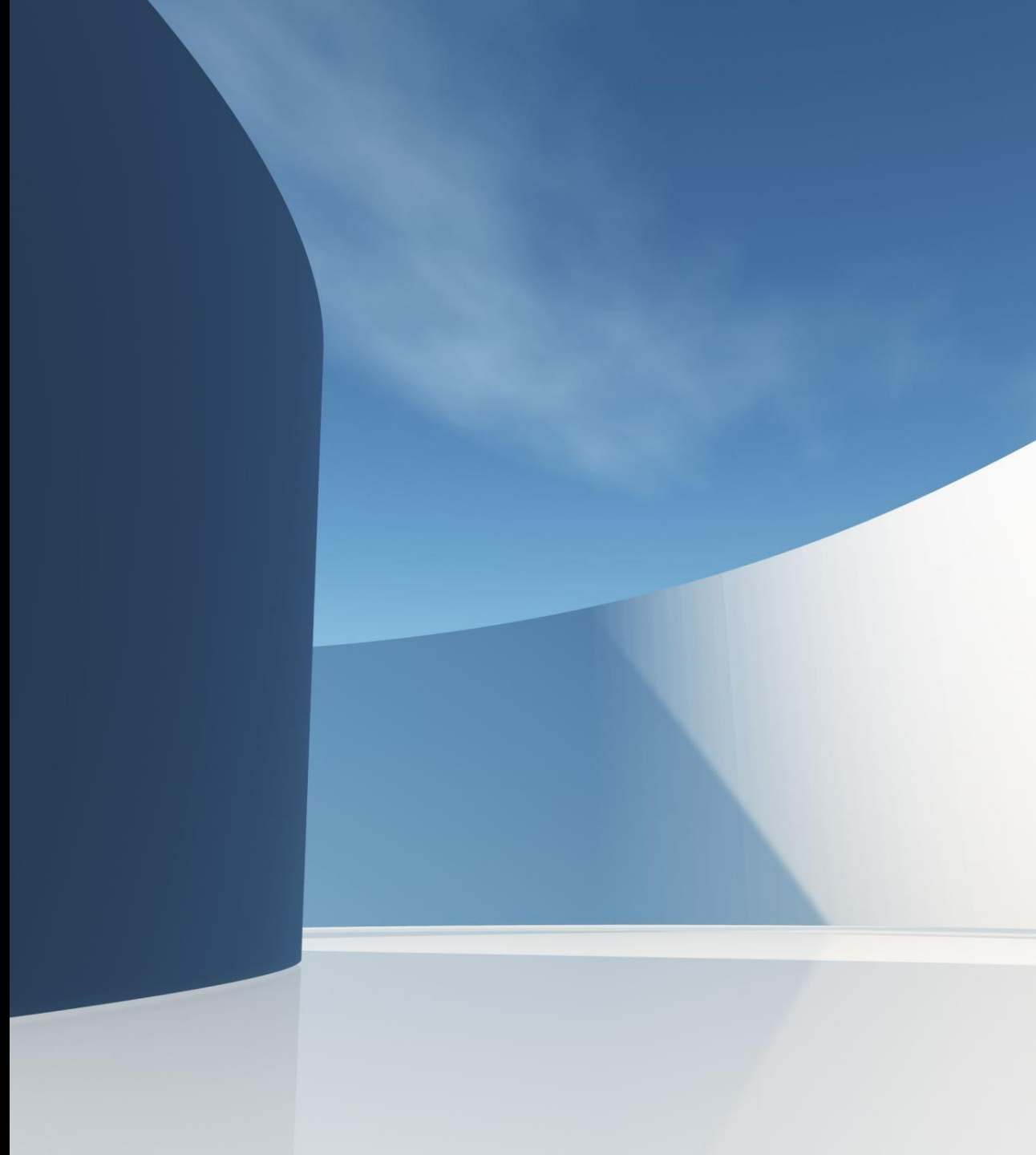
Provocations

Task 1: pre-DMPLG 2 min provocation:

In your embodied internal eye....if this week's large group were a thing.....eg. a human, a land creature, a sea creature a bird, part of the landscape, an element, something mythical, a figment of your imagination... etc.....then what would it be? Please send before Large Group.

Task 2: a follow-up, post-group task:

Please spend three minutes writing a spontaneously response that links your image to this week's DMP Large Group staying in the orbit of your role as tutor-facilitator-participant.



RESPONSE TO PROVOCATION

A Giant Size Troll.

Troll- hmmm this image has not come out during the session.

I supposed given the characteristics of a being like Troll: I felt strong and present inside my core being as I participated in the process. I had been standing up more than being on the ground and I noticed that most students were on the floor. I remembered vividly the clapping that I have persisted in joining the humming chorus initiated by the students and I was clapping and stomping at one point. Yes, strong presence seemed to sum up my experience in my role as tutor- facilitator- participant.

RESPONSE TO PROVOCATION

A brightly coloured flag billowing in the wind.

The partition was closed, creating spaces within spaces. Territories divided, with an open door providing a corridor between two lands. Whose territories are these? What are the rules? Participants play with demanding passwords. Like Alice in wonderland, the answers don't need to make sense. There is a log jam between the rooms and some need to step over bodies lying in the way. The imagination runs riot as sounds percolate from one room to the next. I can never see the complete picture and I'm unsure of the transition from one room to the other. From one state to another. From laughter to crying. From love to hatred. From student to professional. Three hooded figures are bent over, hide from the world. One slides beneath a stack of chairs. I sit close by. Waiting; sensing a heaviness and a grief and I sink down into a timeless zone, clasping my knees.. There is a liveliness around me as I fly the flag for waiting, without expectation of any action. There is grief all around, with the scent of our mortality in the demise of parents and grandparents. A race to the finishing line exposes a competition. Tik Tock watch the clock. Time is running out. And then what? Who do I become as I pass from the active, lively culture in one room into the meditative humming of the other, as bodies lean against the white wall and hum, harmonising and improvising with sound and movement.

Inquiry into alumni
experience



Inviting alumni as one element of the process

Generating knowledge from creative process

Dancing



writing



Mark-making

We asked

How did the experience of the DMP Large Group during training impact on your professional practice post-graduation?

Focus group findings

Employing practice-led a research method.

The method was light, unobtrusive, playful and accessible, allowing the research to be led by curiosity and wonder.

Drawing on posthumanism and new materialism, democratising the process of research and challenging how forms of knowledge are privileged.

Working in the transferences

'...What I've noticed, that there were moments where there were connections, so rather than a student – you could see that anxiety of 'OK, I'm going to say something, I'm going to say something'. Some will finally speak there might be a tutor to help you to deepen that thought process a little bit. There were moments when, actually, students started to speak to each other, and then in doing that, actually, just as you would have in the real world, that suddenly when somebody says something and actually it stimulates something...'

Role Modelling

'...and I felt it was easy for me to be in the position of a facilitator. I'm not in hurry, I am not trying to get space from the participant because that was how I witness all my tutors made it. I didn't feel forced to share or to move; I was invited. So if I tried to hide, but I felt I was loved, so I joined them. And I found when I'm working with people who has lot of major event in their life, like trauma or disability, that kind of kindness or relationship or the space for people to get into; to each other's space, that was essential as I felt that was crucial in my practice and that was what I learned from large group...'

Power and Ethics

'...and in my clinical work or my practice now, it really helps me to welcome people and welcome different language – not only Mandarin, Chinese or English; it was more about what kind of stories the participant wants to share and want to be, because I feel non-verbal or verbal language is just a way to, to do things. So it really brought me back to the story I had in the UK with my peers and also help me to extend – bring those ... in my practice because I love to see people have different stories and emotions in my group. And I have receive many feedback from my participant to say, "I feel safe to share things in your large group because everything seems to be welcome...'

A speculative
experience conducive
to critical learning

'...what came back to me in the movement, firstly, was kind of carving path base and forming connections, like little strings that are coming together. And those moments and memories of really starting from my inner experience, from me, then extending out. And maybe connecting with somebody out there, even in the distance, and then kind of pulling those strings, together almost. Being influenced by my inner experience and then the outer experience I experience in the large group...'

'I think it (feeling excluded) seems to me like a kind of crucial process ... I mean, there are some sort of basic rules, but you don't understand what this community wants from you: why are you there? what is being asked of you? And that sort of makes you confront, you know, this kind of subjective, this e-excluded place in a way, and-and sort of do something with it...'

Large Group: a developmental process

'We sort of harnessed and harboured the first year, the first term's narrative. (In the) Second term (three) was a need to be protected, and then (in) the third term...I'd found my secure base. So... my sense of security in myself, and then how I felt I connected to other people felt like it had kind of really rounded and come together. And then (in the) third year (it) felt like I was standing really fully in my adult body. So there was that sense of owning my narrative and feeling quite secure to be in my body, to be in my gender, my identity, sexuality. And how I therefore relate – I don't know, sort of socio-politically, culturally, to other people in the group'.

Affecting and being affected: becoming significant

'I think there were interesting moments where there would be individual statements that would just sort of land, and every single statement had a significance and...was important. I've noticed, that there were moments where there were connections, so rather than a student – you could see that anxiety of 'OK, I'm going to say something, I'm going to say something'. Some will finally speak there might be a tutor to help you to deepen that thought process a little bit. There were moments when, actually, students started to speak to each other, and then in doing that, actually, just as you would have in the real world, that suddenly when somebody says something and actually it stimulates something.'

Large Group as critical pedagogy in Higher Education:

professional arts therapies training through experiential embodied learning.

- Research as a dynamic process
- Informing pedagogy in the Arts Therapies
- Enhancing professional practice

Our
provocation
to you!

The potential in the Large Group is that uncomfortable tensions can be thought about together towards an emergent group culture that is underpinned by non-oppressive, thoughtful ways of being together.

References

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Thank you!

