

“Break it then Build Again: An Arts Based Duoethnographic Pilot Reconstructing Music Therapy and Dance-Movement Therapy Histories”

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Our communities of origin directly inform our identities and individual perceptions of validity & value. No action that we take as human beings is divorced from our world view. Additionally, our individual world views are each unique to the cultural intersections at which we live (Eisenstein, 1983). To that end, we humbly begin this paper with statements of author positionality.

Natasha: “I am a Black, Queer, femme, chronically ill academic and board certified music therapist (MT-BC), living and working in the Midwest region of the United States. You will not find many people who look like me in my profession. Yet I am one of billions of Black and/or Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) from cultures where the use of music as a healing modality is a foundational aspect of their collective history and current practices. “

Val: “I am a white, cis-gender, heterosexual professor and board-certified dance/movement therapist (BC-DMT). I live and work in Cambridge, Massachusetts (also in the USA). I am part of the majority of white females in the dance/movement therapy field... I have learned most recently and through the advocacy of my colleagues of color, that there were several DMTs of color in the advent of the field who were not included in the text books. Recognizing that dance and movement have been Indigenous practices for healing for thousands of years, how can we reconcile all this suppressed history?”

With awareness of the foundation of our core principles in the arts therapies in the United States, and the perspectives missing from those core principles, we strive to name and begin to deconstruct the complicated histories of our clinical fields, to embody and amplify the healing

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practices of movement and music inherent in us that came long before the “founders” of dance/movement or music therapy as clinical fields, and to co-create knowledge that is (re)infused with those marginalized voices that have previously been discarded or ignored. We seek to do this in ways that are intentionally and deeply personal, rooted in critical approaches that are informed by critical race theory and healing justice perspectives. We are additionally informed by the decolonizing work of our BIPOC colleagues, as well as our own lived experiences. We believe this type of collective memory work is integral to not only our professions, but to the world at large.

The Problem at Hand

In June of 2020, the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) was critically called out after their delayed response of solidarity and support of their BIPOC membership in the wake of the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and countless other Black lives who have been lost to systemic violence in the U.S. In the following weeks, as the board of directors worked to address this harm, affinity groups within the ADTA who had experienced marginalization continued to demand to be seen, valued, and heard in their national organization, in training programs, and in the landscape of the history of dance/movement therapy. This process has paralleled other arts therapies colleagues’ organizations. In music therapy particularly, the resignation of the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA)’s last executive director centered around issues of closed “safe” spaces for the association’s various affinity groups at conferences. At the time of the association’s November 2019 conference, board leadership expressed resistance to addressing the validity and importance of closed spaces to meet the unique professional education and support needs of marginalized therapists. Since that conference, the AMTA board, at the urging of its membership, hired a search firm that has

prioritized diversity, equity and inclusion as foundational issues to the search process for its new CEO, who was subsequently announced to be a Black woman.

These recent calls to action are a part of a historical insistence toward inclusion and equity in our professions and utilizing our art forms to interrogate dominant and accepted narratives (Cantrick, 2018; Carmichael, 2013; Chang, 2016; Caldwell & Johnson, 2012; Grayson, Howard, & Puloka, 2019; Kawano & Chang, 2020; Campbell, 2020; Rot, 2018; Sterling & Belnavis, 2020; Smart, 2019; Gamba, 2019; Reynolds, 2019; Nichols, 2019; White, 2019). For this particular project, as researchers from dance/movement therapy and music therapy, our goal was to examine and critique the narratives in both fields, including personal narrative and arts-based work, analyzed through the autoethnographic process of identifying and contextualizing individual experiences within the broader socio-cultural phenomena that surround them.

In the Literature

In 1974 art therapist Cliff Joseph, a Black man, presented a panel discussion titled “Art and the Third World” at the 5th annual convention of the American Art Therapy Association (Joseph, 1974). He openly critiqued the field for not only its lack of diversity in its membership, but its lack of awareness of minoritized experiences. He challenged his colleagues to consider what they might yet have to learn from their minoritized colleagues, as well as what a more culturally cognizant art therapy field might have to offer the broader scopes of psychology and other mental health fields.

Professionals in the arts therapies have described their process of collecting various cultural histories as being “daunting” (Davis & Hadley, 2015, pp 17), with awareness that each collection is limited by the authors’ own experiences; also that systematic issues of power,

dominant narratives and under-represented views are often left unsaid (Kawano & Chang, 2019). The use of art as a healing modality is one that dates far back into human history, and most certainly predates the coining of terms to make their therapeutic use into ‘professions.’ As we look at these origins, we are intentional of keeping in mind our own personal locations and the histories of people from whom we are directly descended, particularly where those peoples and their contributions to history have gone unrecognized or dehumanized by dominant historians. We use the term Indigenous here with great intentionality to refer to those peoples, whether in Africa, Asia, North America or elsewhere, who “originate from their ancestral lands and are connected to their traditional and cultural heritage” (Linklater, 2011, p. 21). Beacons of culture and creativity originating from Indigenous peoples have historically been - and are presently - interwoven globally across tribes and traditions, serving purposes across education, housing, agriculture, trading, and the general health of the community (Floyd, Zech & Ramsey, 2017; Mercer, 2015). For example, on the African continent, where Natasha’s ancestry lies, Indigenous peoples have made - and continue to make! - inherently creative and innovative uses of raw materials that have been historically minimized (Gottschild, 2003; Cruz Banks, 2012). This minimization is part of a broader pattern of devaluing the continued impact of global Indigenous practices.

Across the world, various Indigenous tribes and cultural groups have long held to their own tribe-specific wholistic¹ views of health. To many, art has served as a “unifying source” of cultural pride and ancestral knowledge (Rivera & Hérard-Marshall, 2019, para 4). Through everyday acts such as communal singing and dancing (Archibald, Dewar, Reid & Stevens,

¹ This spelling of the term is intentional, drawing from Renee Linklater (2010)’s perspective on decolonizing the term from a Western connotation of “holiness” that implies aspiration to a hierarchical divinity, in favor of emphasizing a “wholeness” of personhood that is rooted in community.

2012), basket weaving and teepee painting, art was - and is - an integral and effective tool for sustaining the health of the people, as well as a thriving connection to the land and each tribe/culture's spirituality that has both predated and sustained Indigenous peoples through generations of systemic oppression (Coburn, 2020).

Codifying the professional use of the arts for healing is a relatively recent construct, and has arguably been wielded as tools of oppression themselves, an extension of colonization. Originating in the context and landscape of psychological theories and practice that have siloed mental health from physical health, the beginnings of formal music therapy and dance/movement therapy grew from Western - i.e., Eurocentric, cisgendered, male, abled, Christian, and heterosexually dominated - theories of personality, behavior, and relationship. In addition to this, the arts therapies are built on foundations of aesthetics with fixed and subjective views of beauty (Kant, 1790, as cited in Ross, 1994). These views are often coming from an “unacknowledged value system” (Lochlin, 1971, para 2) where the white Western male view is the norm. Our two particular fields, music therapy and dance-movement therapy, branch from widely accepted white norms of both humanism and aesthetics, that center ideals of individualism and self-actualization (Hadley & Thomas, 2018; Kawano & Chang, 2018). The repetition of these canons of thought and theory across generations of these fields lead to further siloing and silencing, pushing voices to the margins in a myriad of ways, including the misguided pathologizing of culturally specific behaviors, which can be deeply harmful (Braveheart, 1998; Ahmed, 2013; Tuck, 2015). How can these fields move beyond surface level multicultural practices without deeply questioning and interrogating the systemic context in which they are taught (Awais, 2018; Kawano & Chang, 2019)?

These paradoxical perspectives have sat at the origin point of creative arts therapy histories and collective memory for decades (Davis & Hadley, 2015). They have not, however, gone unchallenged. Since Cliff Joseph's 1974 critique, various creative arts therapists have made important contributions to countering the accepted narratives of their fields in the arenas of feminism (Curtis, 1990; Hadley, 2006; Hahna, 2013), decolonization (Grayson, A., Howard, L, & Puloka, R., 2019; Pavlicevic, 2001; Kenny, 2002; Low, Ser & Kalsi, 2020), and other critical perspectives (Sajnani, 2011; Hadley & Norris, 2016; Hadley & Thomas, 2018; Kawano, T. & Chang, M., 2019; Leonard, 2020). Some of these shifts have resulted in entire theoretical subsections of our fields being developed, such as community music therapy, which integrates more culture-centered and critical approaches (Ansdell, 2002; Stige, 2002). As another example, Dr. Joy DeGruy's (2005) theory on post-traumatic slave syndrome has been integrated as an approach for dance/movement therapy work (Campbell, 2019).

Even with these integrations, the histories and present practice of our fields are naturally complicated, embodying colonizing relational practices that perpetuate the continued erasure, dismissal, appropriation, and oppression of marginalized communities. As an example, the foundation and history of modern dance, from which the dance/movement therapy field grew, comes from a Eurocentric lens and includes a multitude of voices like Ted Shawn, Rudolph Laban, and Isadora Duncan that degraded and debased the aesthetics of the African diaspora making comparisons to being primitive, savage, grotesque, and generally less-than (Duncan, 1927; Scolieri, 2019; Laban, 1975). Relatedly, our various professional associations' often delayed or lacking responses to issues like the Pulse Nightclub shooting, which targeted the American Queer community in 2016, or the ongoing American Racial Justice Movement indicate a dismissal or devaluing of the lives from those communities. Alongside all this, music

and other creative arts therapists continue to engage with the construct of (neo)Shamanism (Archibald et al., 2012; Napoli, 2019) contributing to the ongoing erasure and appropriation of Indigenous perspectives, indicating that there is still much more critical work to be done in the creative therapies.

Decolonization, as described by Fanon (1963) is a historical process which sets out to “change the order of the world” (pp 36) and this is the frame to which we are aspiring. As terms go, this may seem vague to some, but at its core is the returning of land and life to Indigenous peoples (Tuck & Yang, 2012). By deconstructing the ways that Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) and other minoritized people have been diminished from their historical place in the canons of music therapy and dance-movement therapy, we are undertaking a crucial form of collective memory and healing work that we believe lays groundwork for the necessary moving beyond superficial inclusion and diversity, and directly confronting that which is unsettling about colonization itself, which is the erasure, appropriation, abuse and murder of Indigenous peoples globally.

These kinds of critical processes are necessary not just to minoritized professionals working in the field, but also to the people with whom we work. In conceptualizing the necessity of engagement with complicated political histories, Harris (2012) asserts that any individual in a position of power must engage in a practice of “memory work” to “tend” to historical trauma or wounds by turning - and returning! - to these places, “Respectfully. Determinedly. Without the recklessness of rush” (“Of Opacity,” para. 3).

The impact of skipping or rushing through the kind of memory work described by Verne can be seen in psychology literature, which has found that session participants generally do not appreciate therapists who they do not believe are capable of seeing or engaging with them in

culturally relevant ways (Meyer & Zane, 2013). Creative arts therapies literature has reflected this impact in the sense of disconnection that students of color from various creative therapy disciplines feel as they transition to professional status. They struggle to see themselves in the Westernized psychology and aesthetics elevated in the classrooms (Sterling & Belnavis, 2020; Ko, 2019; Chang, 2009; Hsaio, 2011). These disconnections come to a head when students are often working with marginalized communities and specifically communities of color. They may feel as though they are being instructed to force a white, Western lens onto communities, with no knowledge of how to more appropriately allow space for their session participants to bring their own cultural identities into the relational and creative space. This can feel disorienting and can erase cross-cultural experiences of movement and music, creating all new wounds that must be healed in order for the clinician to function effectively and healthily (Sterling & Belnavis, 2020).

This is the foundation of healing justice work, as defined by Valenti, Shapiro, Price, Lathrop, Sachdev, & Page, (2010), a practice which was devised out of a desire to “lay down the groundwork for deconstructing practices and models that have targeted many of our communities based on ableist, racist, classist, gender-exclusive, homophobic, and white supremacist assumptions” (pp 121). By integrating this construct with that of memory work and all the aforementioned arts based critical perspectives, we then move forward to ask: how might we emerge from such obscured and disembodied histories and view these through a critical lens that “examines the entire edifice” (West, 1995, pg. xi) including its role in maintaining systems of oppression? What possibilities might a (re) grounding and (re) integration of oppressed perspectives make more tangible for the creative arts therapy fields? What emerges when we integrate our respective art forms in active collaboration from this kind of critical, healing justice framework?

Our Present Work

Here we begin: to embark as a dance-movement therapist and music therapist from uniquely distinct cultural backgrounds to identify the points of divergence and convergence of our own individual and collective histories as artists, as people, as helpers and as culturally situated beings, in order to deconstruct the “implicit and explicit practices” in our fields (Hadley & Thomas, 2018, pg. 173) and reconstruct a means of more wholistically engaging with history in an embodied way that includes our personal histories. We wish to do this not just for ourselves, to feel seen and honored in our fields’ histories, but in such a way that current and future emerging professionals might also be able to contribute to a more rich and diverse (re)construction of history, thus better equipping them to honor their clients in ways that are culturally cognizant and sustaining.

Methodology

Our purpose for this duoethnographic arts-based exploration is to resituate a more inclusive and personal history in both our own bodies and professional practices, while avoiding a singular, essentialist, or obscurance of non-dominant narratives (Hadley & Thomas, 2018; Sajnani, 2012; Kawano & Chang, 2019). We acknowledge that this is work which we are *stepping into*: work that has been done by generations before us and will continue long after we have become dust. We thus seek to enter this work with gratitude towards those who came before us, and in honor of those to follow.

Our methodology for this utilizes an arts based approach to duoethnography, as described by Sawyer & Norris (2012). This approach involves the primary researchers as the sole study subjects, supporting the dialogic sharing and integration of personal stories and epistemology of each researcher within the larger cultural context, similar to other constructs like collaborative

autoethnography (Creswell, 2013). Duoethnography specifically invites personal stories shared between researchers to be compared and wrestled with collectively in ways that deconstruct them, then reconstruct and reconceptualize the emerging themes in relation to perceived problems at hand (Sawyer & Norris, 2012). This elevates them beyond the level of shared experience to become critically examined windows into the culture in which they are situated (Chang, Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2012).

Arts based research, as defined by Austin & Forinash (2005) involves rigorous and systematic engagement with art as central to the research process, either as a means to respond to raw data, or to lift the analysis to otherwise unattainable levels. This methodology also responds to the need for arts-based writers and researchers to share their relationship to and with their work (Leavy, 2015). In fields like music therapy and dance/movement therapy, where the foundation is based in relationship and creativity, researchers need to utilize methods that follow the same path of inquiry.

For this project, we have utilized a converging and diverging collaborative approach, which has occurred in synchronous time together online via Zoom, with minimal asynchronous components (individual art making and journaling). Data collection occurred during the first third of a three week research fellowship that we, as authors and primary investigators, received funding to attend. Funding was provided by Indiana University, where Natasha was employed at the time of this project. The broader purpose of that fellowship, which was focused on grant writing, was outside the scope of this paper; the funders had no involvement in the study design, data collection, analysis or in the decision to write and submit this article for publication. However, the setting and prompts within the fellowship provided a catalyst for discussion around arts based inquiry and visioning that were foundational for this project, and funding from the

fellowship allowed for the hiring of an Indigenous sensitivity reader, who provided vital feedback on this project. A detailed overview of our approach is described below, and represented visually in Fig 1.1.

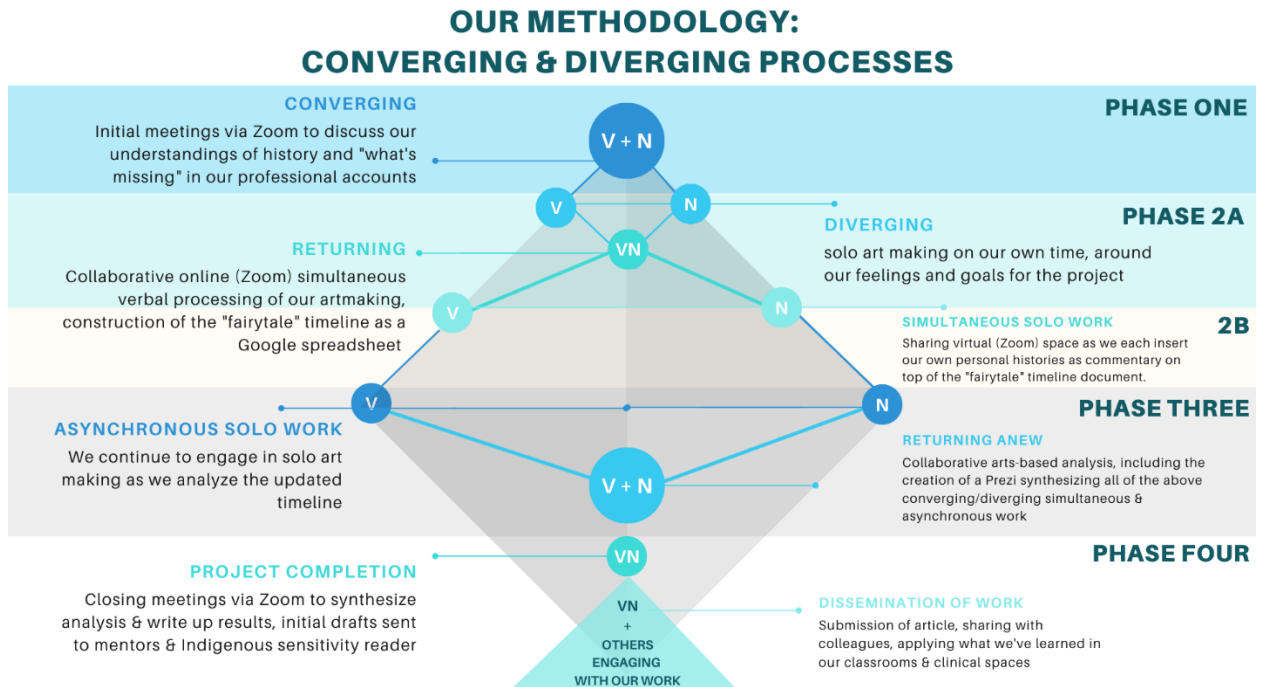


FIGURE 1.1

This pilot project involved four phases of inquiry, across 5 days of meetings and ten recorded dialoguing sessions, all conducted virtually via Zoom. Phase One began with an initial coming together to discuss our understandings of history and what we felt like was missing. This was done to determine the structure for data collection, which began in phase two. Phase Two involved two parallel actions. One was solo art making, on our own time, around our feelings and goals for the project and then returning together to share our art with each other. The second action was creating a “fairytale timeline” that included both the histories from our respective fields and our own personal cultural histories. Phase Three moved us into analyzing the data from our previous phases. This included analyzing conversation data from our verbal

interactions in Phase One via manual axial coding (Creswell, 2013). Axial coding included highlighting specific quotes that seemed significant throughout each document, then color coding them to group into broader themes. We also engaged in arts based data analysis of our art making from Phase Two, utilizing the aesthetic response of poetic inquiry described by Gerge, Warja & Nygaard Pederson (2017). This model of arts based analysis involved first relating to the art on a cognitive level, then an embodied one, reflecting and reacting to it in ways that yielded additional data and insights from the data. This aesthetic response resulted in an interactive map/timeline Prezi which integrated the information from the analyzed timeline. In Phase Four, we synthesized our analysis to glean themes from our data and wrote up our results. This last phase also included collaboration with an Indigenous sensitivity reader.

Our process in this arts based, collaborative, and duoethnographic approach addresses the following questions:

1. What emerges when a BC-DMT (Valerie) & MT-BC (Natasha) utilize their respective artforms in active creative collaboration to deconstruct the histories they have been taught?
2. In what ways might this process of arts based collaborative deconstruction impact the therapists' ability to think critically about the history of their respective fields and their place in them?
3. How might this process be leveraged to support culturally affirming and sustaining practices in creative arts therapies education and training, with particular regard to the use of technology and collaboration across art forms?

We, as primary researchers and subjects in this arts based duoethnographic study, engaged in active collaboration from a critical framework, particularly influenced by

decolonizing perspectives and healing justice frameworks. We recognize the monumental nature of this task, and the reality that we both, as co-authors and co-strugglers against colonization are really only just at the beginning of this work. This project alone could not possibly be considered to be decolonial in its entirety. However, we believe the process we have undertaken contributes to necessary elements of decolonization and healing justice, namely the kind of memory work described by Harris (2012) to confront sources of historical trauma. By doing this, we are rejecting “moves to innocence” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, pp 3) of the settler colonial state and instead moving towards “reshaping the infrastructure” (McCarthy-Brown, 2014, pg. 129) as a means of healing towards justice. In this way, it is our hope to propose a change to the way creative arts therapy history is engaged with and taught, with Indigenous stewardship and cultures of co-creation at the core of our relationships in furthering the research goals. For Natasha, this is regarded as a personally healing project, to ask and answer the questions of “where am I? Where are my people? What has happened to us? And where might we go from here?” For both Natasha & Valerie, the need to be vigilant about applying a critical and aspirationally decolonizing lens to our work, reflections, roles & outcomes was crucial.

Results

Individual and collective art making and reflexive journaling wove in and out of our dialoguing sessions. Building from an arts based research framework (Forinash 2005), art was central to this dialogic process. It served the purpose of embodied grounding as a means of processing our reflection from a place of ‘felt’ senses. Additionally, art served as a catalyst for further dialogic or embodied needs and/or expressions.

Upon our initial round of coding, seven major themes were identified, with 91 sub-themes spanning across them. Further rounds of discussion and consolidation of these themes, in relation to the reflexive process of arts based and dialogic processes, led to reducing these sub-categories to integrate them into the main themes. One area that was initially qualified as a sub-theme was elevated to its own umbrella status. This resulted in a total of seven core themes (Table 1.1)

1. “Getting back into the body”: Grounding and sensing in the arts-based data collection process
2. The “catalytic” process of crafting: using art to expand reflection and dialogue
3. (re)Defining terms: shared understandings and transformation of language
4. Interrogating History: affirming “lost” stories & decentering whiteness
5. Personal motivations and accountability: balancing mindful holding and bounded space with the complex multiplicity of our histories
6. The demands of teaching: applying critical examination in the context of “core principles”
7. Cultivating collaboration and co-creation: shared decision making without tokenization

Table 1.1

Given that art was woven throughout this process, each category includes discussions of arts based data as well as data derived from our dialogic discussions or individual reflections.

“Getting back into the body”- Grounding and sensing in the arts-based data collection process

As the data collection process unfolded, the central grounding and sensing role of the art making process continued to weave its way in and out of our results. “Getting back into the body” was used as a way for the authors to return to their own sense of the purpose of the study through embodied experiences, often following intensive conversations and writing exercises from our research fellowship meetings. We dialogued through and throughout this process of writing and moving:

Natasha: Maybe, actually, maybe that there's a statement in there...about history. It's not just something we read.

Valerie: Something about like it's lived experiences, right?

Natasha: Yeah. Yeah. And something about it being like embodied in us

This conversation laid a foundation for the verbal process and subsequent writing to be based in sensory and body based language. If the underlying idea was that stories were “embodied in us” there needed to be an ongoing process of incorporating movement and music making to keep the writing and knowledge sharing within this embodied frame. Throughout the academy weeks, we used an artistic process as personal explorations of emerging concepts. An example of our collaboration through the arts in real time included a session where we built both music and movement through an improvisation. In these moments of artistic collaboration,

through the synchronous process of making art, there was a concurrent theme of changing and building up through the artistic process. This unfolded as Natasha created sound; this would shift Valerie's movement or when there was synchronous movement, musical shifts would occur.

Valerie: ...when your voice came in, I just felt this, um, I dunno like this, almost like a nurturing, nurturing movement. So I was doing like a lot of gathering and then felt like. I don't know, I had an image of like rocking a child

Natasha: or something lullaby-ish. And it's - so the reason, like I started to add voice because I was feeling like I was fixated on the technology piece and I hadn't fully gotten into my body yet. And so doing the voice was my way of trying to get into my body.

These moments of shifting the sounds or movement aided in further connection between the two collaborators while at the same time allowing deeper grounding into their own embodied sense. Sensory-based language and processes emerged as important and intentionally non-linear way of processing our work. This process stemmed both from previous understandings of collaborative work, but also in partial response to a prompt from the research intensive, to explore "diverging and converging:" separating to work alone, then coming back together. One of Natasha's choices during a moment of divergence was to diagram her needs and desires for the project out in a visual format, resulting in a two page piece of art that outlined what she perceived as desired project outcomes (Fig 1.2). This exploration was an example of a felt sense that emerged through the dialogue that could be translated into an artistic expression.

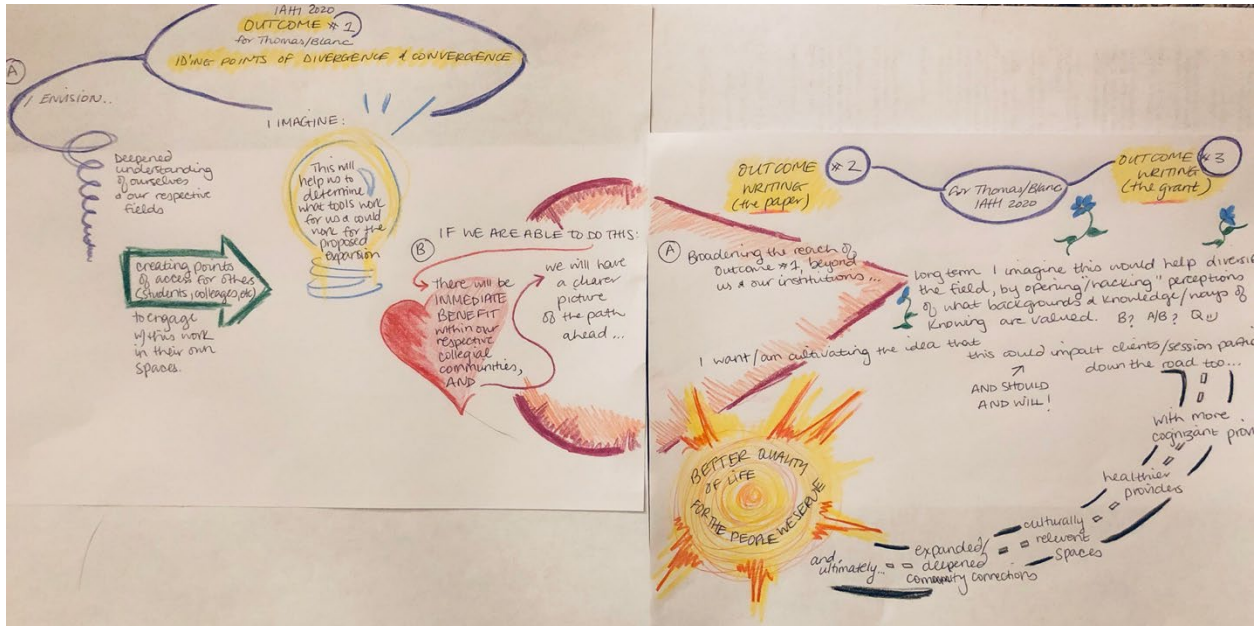


Fig 1.2

Natasha described her piece as something that helped her to synthesize her need to “see” or “locate” herself in a way that was situated in the broader context of the project. In this way, Natasha sought to affirm how her work of self-location as part of the broader project.

The ‘Catalytic’ Process of Crafting

The role of art as a catalyst for further reflection and dialogue emerged from our initial grounding and sensing through the work in several distinct ways. Typically this catalytic crafting was uni-directional, stemming directly from our embodied grounding, then flowing straightforwardly into art making that processed the results with sensory language. An example of this would be Natasha’s diagrammatic work described above, which aided her in moving forward from a grounded place into streamlining and clarifying her goals for the work at hand.

Another example of the catalytic process of artmaking occurred in a moment where Valerie felt led to explore and interrogate a question she was feeling “stuck” in, which is the experience of feeling seen. In this moment she engaged with movement as a way to simultaneously process and clarify that feeling while also bringing herself to a place where she could generate meaning and direction from it. She explored movements of covering her eyes, and opening and closing her hands to find and obscure her vision. She also found movements of searching, moving things aside to find what lay underneath. These movements allowed her to make meaning around her own personal connection to her work in the project. If she herself had experienced feeling “seen” or at least seen her image reflected in the white founders of her field, what lay below that narrative, underneath the pages of the accepted texts?

Still other times our crafting served to generate further reflexive responses to elements we thought we had “finished” processing. As an example of this, Valerie and Natasha chose to move together after a day of writing, anticipating that the art would serve in that moment as processing of the days events and a means of re-grounding to return to our lives as parents and spouses (or other ‘non-work’ roles). We chose in that moment to move to the music we’d been writing to, a collection of vocal duets by Baroque French Composer Francois Couperin. The first piece in that album was an arrangement of the Magnificat, a Christian religious text typically sung in Latin. The results of that choice, and the movement experience within it, surprised us:

Valerie: We talked about shaking, shaking things up, then here comes this super, you know, religious thing...That’s not something I usually move to...

Natasha: Yeah, it’s usually something that’s just me sitting and listening...(but) we both totally brought ourselves into it. There’s something in that.

This moment seemed to bring forward for us a reminder of how important it was to interrogate our instincts to center that which has been traditionally validated. This was something we had set out with careful intention to do, and yet - completely unintentionally - fallen into as an instinctive choice. It was a reminder of how anti-oppressive work is never truly “done.” It is ongoing, active, and reflexive. These are things we thought we “knew” in a cognitive sense, but in this catalytic moment, the art reminded us.

(re)Defining Terms

As we edged further into this interrogatory and arts based work, we were consistently reminded of the need to be sure we were operating from the same definitions of terms and translational language between our art and written work. The choice to define our collaboration as a “non-linear,” with art “weaving” in and throughout our processes - particularly improvisational movement and music making via virtual platforms like Zoom - was part of this. These types of agreements arose from dialogue and synchronous writing in shared documents on Google Drive, as well as across asynchronous platforms like text and email. Other terms or constructs, like “duoethnography” emerged from our collaborative literature review process and conversations with a research mentor, finding books and articles that resonated with us personally and then sharing and negotiating through them collectively.

It also felt necessary to distinguish themes of healing practices and beliefs across our respective mediums of movement and music from the fields of music therapy and dance-movement therapy, particularly because those constructs pre-dated the creation of “professions” around them:

Natasha: the use of art as a healing modality, like dating back in human history...it like, it integrates dance naturally into the conversation (about music)...

Valerie: white guys think they invented this? (laughter)

Issues surrounding the idea of ownership and invention would recur in further discussions as we continued interrogating the histories of our respective fields, as well as our personal locations within those histories.

Interrogating History: Affirming “lost” stories & Decentering whiteness

The desire and challenge of deconstructing the widely accepted histories of our various creative arts therapies while (re)infusing these histories with our own familial and personal stories was a heavily prominent theme throughout this project. This work included the creation of what we called “the fairytale” timeline, compiling those elements from text books we had either learned from or were actively teaching from ourselves into a single Google spreadsheet. These textbooks each contained elements of acknowledging that the histories they shared were incomplete and heavily Western focused, and attempted to insert perspectives from non-Western cultures, but gaps were readily apparent throughout this deconstruction process. We shared these realizations in conversations and comments directly on the shared document between us. For instance, Natasha noted at one point that “there's not a whole lot of background” on the continent of Africa or the contributions of Black therapists anywhere on the timeline of modern music therapy history that she was seeing until 1970. The continent of Asia did not appear to be mentioned in the textbooks she was familiar with at all. These rememberings resonated strongly in Natasha as a reverberation of her personally driving question of “where am I? Why am I not here?”

Valerie described the process of discovering statements from some of the early modern dancers, from whom dance/movement therapy originated, dismissing Black and Indigenous practices, or categorizing them as lesser or more developmentally stunted forms of movement - all while elevating more Western styles of movement as foundational to dance history - as “heartbreaking.” As a white educator and practitioner of dance/movement therapy, she *had* felt included in the landscape and theoretical framework of the field, yet seeing this derogatory view of the aesthetics of non-white cultures by modern dance theorists called much into question. These experiences were particularly amplified by the fact that so many of these foundational theorists, despite being so dismissive, were clearly fascinated and influenced by these styles in many appropriative ways. Reflecting on this she said, “You know, white supremacy is all about ownership, taking and owning...”

Themes of legitimacy and ownership arose in several dialogues for the researchers around how the process of the need to legitimize fields that are historically viewed as adjunctive or alternative therapies, which were often dominated by women. Does the need to legitimize in a landscape of cis gender male-driven psychological theories enable practitioners to unwittingly erase the practices of cultures who came before and are still practiced?

Valerie: I have that theory about this need to legitimize and feeling kind of less than in certain spaces, like psychological spaces or whatever. And I'm wondering if that led to, you know, pushing certain, ways of working aside...it feels like this is that I'm curious about the role of my white predecessors.

Natasha: Yeah. Cause it's almost like what I hear, what you're saying is that like, they were looking to diminish feelings of “less than” by validating what they were doing. But

in the process of doing that, they contributed to...not maybe “who's better,” but feelings of “less than” in others.

Our questions expanded to include this question of the process of feeling “less than” as an embedded and implicit frame that caused harm and exclusion as it was passed down in the canon and history of music therapy and dance/movement therapy. By including certain voices to build a “robust” and “legitimate field,” there were narratives and voices from Black, Indigenous and other minoritized communities that were excluded. As a personal arts-based inquiry Valerie explored the theme of legitimacy through improvisational movement. She found a repeated gesture of stacking fists in a vertical line starting at her stomach and stacking to above her head. There was an embodied sense of tension and linearity in the movement that led to a tension in the face and torso as a whole which led to a limited sense of vision and gaze. She noticed that this movement phrase was strong and secure but limiting, especially if she wanted to see beyond that sense of building up in the vertical.

Natasha similarly explored this area through a movement based improvisation to the Moses Sumney song ‘Virile.’ Originally penned by the songwriter as an anthem in opposition to masculine gender norms, Natasha found a sense of connection to lyrics about gatekeeping and expectations of compliance. In moving to this piece, Natasha found herself returning to two gestures: first, the action of raising one knee to drive the heel downwards towards the floor, “Kicking out the floor beneath me, knowing full well I may fall into it at any moment.” In her second gesture, Natasha described the act of placing her hands over her chest while wiggling her fingers and stretching out her toes with a deep breath to ground herself as a way of remembering, “Breathing and trusting that I’ll be ok throughout this process.” In this way she affirmed for herself that this work of dismantling was necessary work, to contribute to the making of space

for something bigger and better, and that she had to trust that work was ongoing; she also expressed comfort in the belief that her communities of origin would support her through any fallout, even if she wasn't able to stay inside the house she was dismantling for long.

The culmination of this theme of interrogating histories is the creation of a living, interactive space that serves as both timeline and map of our personal histories as woven through “modern” music therapy and dance-movement therapy histories. That space can be found [HERE](#), and includes personalized art interpretations of various moments in time and culture.

Personal Motivation & Accountability

There were several instances where the discussion and discourse became a space for uncovering and sharing knowledge. This process occurred as we sat with each other through personal moments of discomfort: sometimes affirming each other's interrogation and sometimes challenging those interrogations. One example emerged from the reflexive defining of our personal needs for the project. As Natasha defined her need to locate herself and restore stories in the narrative, Valerie had a moment of struggling and sensing to find her own self in the process. There was a moment of trying to find a personal storying that was similar to her colleague, and yet realizing that this was not the role that she needed to play as a white person in that space.

Valerie: I'm trying to work on it on my own and not,

Natasha: Here is a space for that, so it's not, it's not going to feel like dumping.

Valerie: I appreciate that.

In this way Natasha affirmed her own receptiveness for Valerie to explore these feelings with her, while also simultaneously holding her accountable to her own solo process of decentering whiteness. In this moment, Valerie was taking her own personal work out of the larger conversation in an attempt to decenter herself and her whiteness. At the same time, however, there was a danger of stepping out of the conversation altogether and not unpacking her own need to find personal meaning from her own positionality. Looking retrospectively, Valerie was also trying to not ask for caretaking from her Black colleague yet at the same time, yearning for validation. The complex layers of this interchange became part of the work of examination and deconstruction for her in this brief moment.

Natasha's personal process of re-integrating personal histories led to some internal interrogation as well, both on the written level and as an arts-based process. On the written level she struggled with discussions of one of her Black ancestors she was seeking to integrate into history, upon reading in a book she found that he was alleged to have possibly "used nefarious means to amass and keep his fortune." The "nefarious means" in question were said to be the spiritual practice of Obeah, a Caribbean folkloric religion. Natasha struggled with accepting the statement as fact, citing historical practices of demonizing African Diasporic spiritual practices and religions alongside the belief still held by many that there was (or is) no way a Black man could come across the amount of wealth her ancestor was alleged to have by any honorable means. "Was he in fact as nefarious as he seemed? Or was his wealth just so unfathomable that people had to look for a "demonic" means to define it? Maybe both are/can be true?"

This concept of "both can be true" bled into Natasha's arts based interrogation as well. In the recreation of a family Calypso favorite by the Might Sparrow, titled "Jean and Dinah," Natasha explored the contrast of the original song's care-free rhythm and tone with the fact that

the subject matter of the piece involves blatant discussions of colonialism and its impact on prostitution in ways that objectify and disempower women. In choosing to reinterpret this song, Natasha chose to infuse the song with slightly more nefarious undertones, layering traditional jaunty Calypso rhythms over brassy electronic sounds and elongated drones, even going so far as to insert clips of laughter over lines from an alternate transliteration of the lyrics, in a way that further texturizes the piece as being equal parts ominous and playful. A full recording of this piece can be found in the online interactive space created for this project.

The Demands of Teaching

As arts therapies educators, the natural application of the critical examination of our combined histories is in the classroom. This emerged for both of us through what students were reporting either through direct experience or current research where students from non-white cultures experienced dissonance when applying what they had learned to their own culture. In our dialogue, we reflected the language and wording of these researchers, using terms like “how to situate” ourselves in the work, or “sojourners’ re-entry adaptation”. One problem that was named was that there is access to marginalized voices in the field but that hasn’t yet made its way into making actual change. We dialogued about the way that expanding the narrative could change the way that core principles are taught in a more expansive and inclusive way, if these narratives were engaged with more intentionally. Valerie reflected around her current difficulty of “finding a way to simultaneously teach the core principles of dance therapy and also critically look at the field’s history (and current practices),” and the increasing tension between those two aspirations. We spoke about the ways that this process had shifted our pedagogical practices and could continue to shift for the fields at large which was illuminated in the dialogue. Also, having

potential deliverables of the timeline and map could be a piece to bring into educational spaces, which could have, as Natasha put it, “immediate benefit to our respective communities.”

These ideas of sharing across disciplines and programs connected to ideas of siloing that have historically led to silencing of voices, which we hoped to subvert with this practice. We saw our practice of building - from a place of collaboration as a model - as having the potential to encourage more communication and connection across these chasms. Natasha described her existing practices of including students in co-construction and co-creation with an Indigenously informed model that she used across two music therapy courses.

“So like last year was the first year that I started having students in my Intro to Music Therapy class co-constructing assignments with me...It's like you do the thing *with* them, not necessarily telling them this is what you're doing, then later it's like, “remember that thing we did? Apply that to what you're learning”...And now they're coming in with the concept of co-constructing and how to look for it...”

Cultivating Collaboration and Co-Creation

Our aspiration of co-creating with students was also mirrored in our own collaborative process. Through the research process, we are able to define more clearly what co-creation could look like, and to distinguish it from the potential misstep of mimicry. We could make specific choices where each person could speak from their own identity and see themselves represented in the work that emerged, held and amplified, but never tokenized. This was interwoven through every aspect of our work including procedural decisions, use of technological tools, and in actually questioning the process as it unfolded. It was (and is) a constantly evolving and reflexive process. At the time of this paper's conception, we had an

external experience of being part of a research institute, where we were offered scaffolding by the facilitators to shape our decision-making and peer support and review from fellow research colleagues. Alongside that, the dialogic process of decision making, creating structure, and procedural choices became a flexible process where we could question structural choices along the way. Instead of following the same procedural choices each time, we would make choices to change the process as we went through.

As we created these structures we were also open to emerging structures and mindfulness of how those structures might need to change and shift as the creative process paralleled the writing, in order to keep art as central, in keeping with the ABR methodology. This was supported by involving synchronous technological tools in our dialogue and planning stages. We used the browser-based whiteboard tool Mural to create visual representations of our timelines, goals and projected outcomes. We also used Google Drive to write and co-create the drafted document in real time. We frequently wrote together while seeing each other in Zoom and listening to one central piece of background music. This engaged and enactive process of writing and decision-making through the use of these tools was something that was a novel experience of collaboration for us both. Replicating elements of previous in person working environments in conjunction with emerging technology for this new, collaborative project allowed the data collection and analysis to unfold in a dialogical way, similar to the co-creation of art and literature gathering. This was something that energized us both throughout the process as well. Natasha said at one point, “This is fun. I'm actually really excited about this.”

Now What? A Discussion

Our experience in deconstructing the histories of dance-movement therapy and music therapy through an arts based duoethnographic process, reconstructing those histories by way of infusing them with our own stories and art woven throughout was a transformative and immersive moment in both our lives. The themes of going back to the body, sensing our way through the work, and the “catalytic” process of crafting affirmed discussions by prior researchers and change agents throughout history, of the ways in which arts based forms of knowing can serve as keys to process through complicated and complex concepts in ways that make them more accessible and embodied (Austin & Forinash, 2005; Awais, 2018). The process of (re)defining terms proved integral as we progressed through interrogating history and our personal motivations and accountability; the principles of decolonization as described by Tuck & Yang (2012) held firmly planted in our minds and bodies. This defining and reconstructing yielded both personal and research goals that drove the process and will continue to shape the work ahead. Within the personal and artistic focus of this pilot, Natasha was able to find ways to culturally affirm the intuitive and innate healing nature of music that was embedded in both her own community experiences and those of a multitude of Indigenous peoples who came before. Valerie was able to name her own responsibility as a white educator in shared spaces, and find ways to use her power to shift the infrastructure and decenter her own whiteness in those roles. The arts-based autoethnographic frame of this project allowed us to continue to return to our bodies as a source for knowledge, while being continually affirmed by the container of our relationship in collaboration.

We are also highly aware of the work that has come before as we step into this landscape of critical knowledge. Considering these themes in the context of the demands of teaching and our desire to cultivate collaboration and co-creation in our own academic spaces we are

reminded of the work of researchers, clinicians, artists, spiritual and other community leaders alike who have pushed our fields (and the broader scenes of art and culture in which they are situated) forward with every breath. We are reminded of Schelly Hill and Goodill's (2017) research practice of movement elicitation in qualitative interviewing, of Gerge et al's (2016) framework of aesthetic response, and so many more we have learned from, as well as those we have yet to encounter. We are committed to this work as a process that is not only situated within our own reflexive lifetimes, but exponentially ripples through and beyond us as well.

Considerations and Invitations

We were limited in this work by nature of only being two. We brought to this work only our lived experiences, but also our biases, assumptions and dead-angles created by the fact that we can only see the world as we live it inside our own bodies. We hope to continue this work with others. We are hopeful that the publication of this pilot will serve as both affirmation and invitation in this regard: to provide perspectives and tools that may be of use to our fellow colleagues in the creative arts therapies in their own decolonizing processes, as well as a call to join us in collaborative expansion and co-creation of further arts based work that is dedicated to the continued deconstruction and reconstruction of our shared histories. We open ourselves to the path ahead, and the opening up to community and trust to be built along the way.

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Table 1.1: Themes

1. “Getting back into the body”: Grounding and sensing in the arts-based data collection process
2. The “catalytic” process of crafting: using art to expand reflection and dialogue
3. (re)Defining terms: shared understandings and transformation of language
4. Interrogating History: affirming “lost” stories & decentering whiteness
5. Personal motivations and accountability: balancing mindful holding and bounded space with the complex multiplicity of our histories
6. The demands of teaching: applying critical examination in the context of “core principles”
7. Cultivating collaboration and co-creation: shared decision making without tokenization

Figures on following page:

OUR METHODOLOGY: CONVERGING & DIVERGING PROCESSES

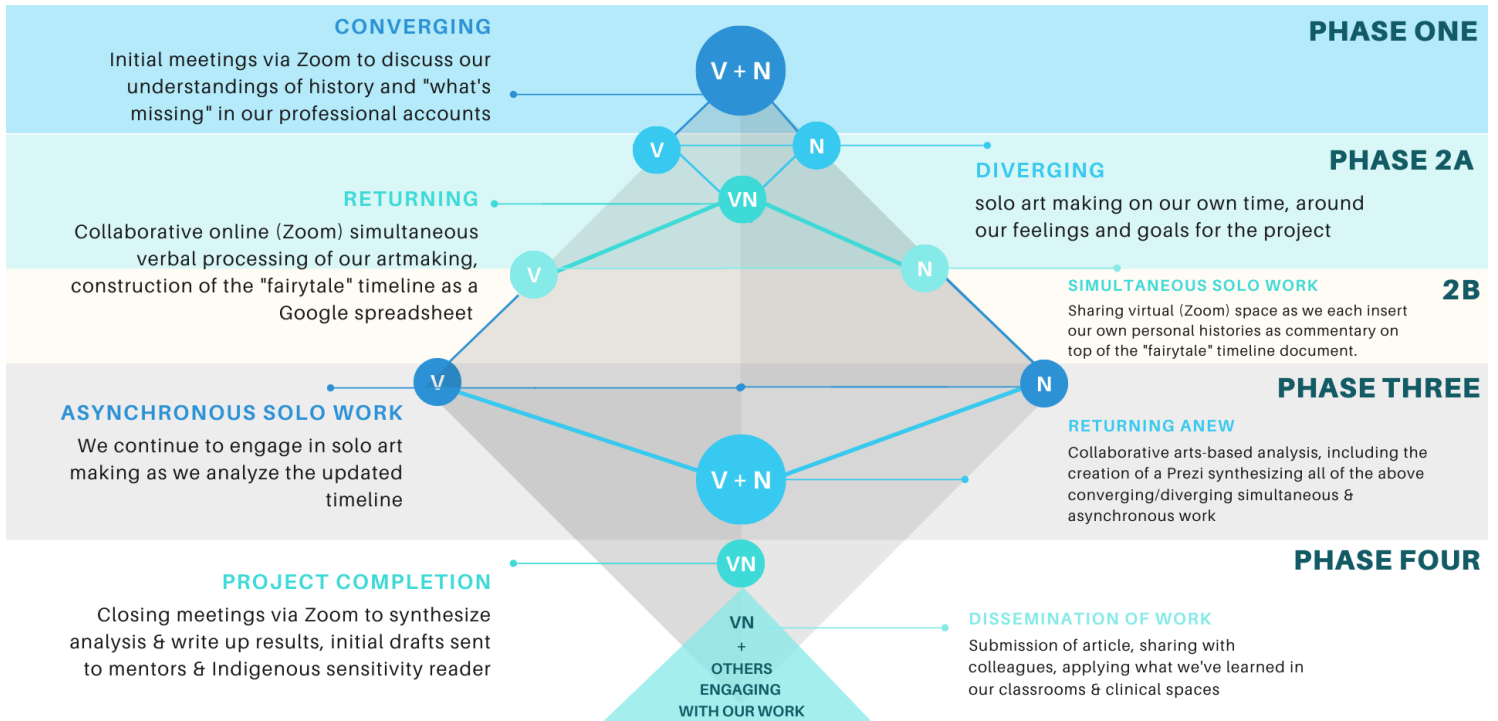


Fig 1.1

Fig 1.2

