

Deconstructing dominant narratives in dance/movement therapy pedagogy: critical consciousness in embodied education

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Living within oppressive social, political and healthcare systems, educators in the Expressive Therapies department at Lesley University have aspired to create spaces in pedagogy and learning where students can simultaneously gain clinical skills and critique the accepted frames of mental health and the arts. Throughout the past 3 years navigating global and collective events of pandemic and racial violence, educators have had to utilize a pedagogy of critique and care, holding not only individual experiences but larger questioning of oppressive systems in the United States and beyond. Within that landscape, our teaching of existing arts therapy theories both from the founders and innovations in the field we found was not enough. Our expressive therapy colleagues and scholars have identified the need for critical lenses in both practice and pedagogy that apply theories from feminism, critical race, and critical consciousness through which the learner can view existing theories of the arts therapies (Hadley, 2013; Hahna, 2013; Sajnani, 2012; Kawano & Chang, 2019; Blanc, 2021). Transparency around dominant narratives in aesthetics, health and therapy, and pedagogy can support critical thinking for the learner and encourage skill sets of defining cultural narratives that have become embedded and invisible in our practices (Hadley, 2013).

Our panel will share our pedagogical practices that have been modelled in mental health counselling (Singh et al, 2020) and incorporated into our core courses at Lesley. We will also share how critical theoretical frames can be applied to the teaching of dance/movement therapy theory and ways that critical thinking skills can be scaffolded for the learner in the arts therapies. Experiences will be shared from educators in dance/movement therapy and drama therapy theories, movement observation, research and counselling courses.

References

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Biography

Dr. Wendy Allen (she/her/hers) is a board-certified dance/movement therapist and licensed professional counselor. Wendy co-directed Project Self-Discovery, a program for marginalized youth that was connected with the Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble in Denver, CO. She served as chair of the Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Somatic Counseling/ Dance/Movement Therapy Department at Naropa University for over a decade. Her current research explores themes of power, oppression, and privilege by examining the somatic aspects

of white privilege and the role that creativity and movement play in justice work. Wendy finds passion in creative processes as teacher, dancer, choreographer, and therapist.

Dr. Nancy Beardall's (she/her/hers) work focuses on dance, dance therapy, and cognitive, social/emotional and relational development in the public schools. Nancy supported Lesley's dance/movement therapy program in her 13-year role as co-ordinator of the DMT specialization. Nancy has developed numerous curricula for middle and high school students promoting wellness, decision-making skills, and healthy relationships. Nancy's research studies have spanned a range of topics from the influence of creative dance on self-esteem to the effectiveness of bullying prevention, and mentoring programs through the arts promoting gender respect and the prevention of harassment and dating abuse; with federal, state and local funding.

Dr. Valerie Blanc (she/her/hers) is an assistant professor at Lesley University in the Expressive Therapies program where she coordinates the dance/movement therapy specialization. She is a member of the ADTA Educators Committee, along with multiple task forces. Her research focuses on pedagogy and educational theory in dance/movement therapy including her dissertation entitled *The Dance Of Becoming: DMT Pedagogy in the U.S.* Valerie has a private practice specializing in work with children and families. Her other clinical experiences include inpatient psychiatric work, community work, and clinician trainings both in the US and internationally.

Dr. Meg Chang (she/her/hers) is a board-certified dance/movement therapist and NYS licensed creative arts therapist who coordinated the Lesley DMT program from 1993-1996 and was a visiting scholar in the dance therapy program in 2018-19. She teaches Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction at the Center for Mindfulness University of Massachusetts. Meg is a founding member of the Multicultural and Diversity Committee of the ADTA whose research and scholarship foregrounds racial and cultural equity and inclusion in dance/movement therapy education. She presents at conferences internationally and is an organizing group member of the Critical Pedagogies in the Arts Therapies (CPAT) Alliance.

Jennifer Wiles (she/her/hers) is a licensed mental health counselor and a board-certified dance/movement therapist. Jennifer has served as the director of the [HEARTplay](#) program and Camp Erin Boston since 2012, supporting grief and bereavement for children and families. Under Jennifer's direction, these programs have expanded significantly; allowing her award-winning programs to serve the wider community. She is on the adjunct faculty of Lesley University's DMT program, and an approved clinical site supervisor. Jennifer is on the Board of Director for the National Alliance for Children's Grief where she also chairs the Education Committee.

Dr. Laura Wood (she/her/hers) is a registered drama therapist, board-certified trainer, licensed mental health counselor, child life specialist and past president of NADTA. She collaborated in the launch of Molloy College's accredited Clinical Mental Health Counseling program. Her clinical work focused on eating disorders, trauma treatment, pediatric hospitals, and assisted living centers. Her research focuses on how therapeutic theater can support individuals in recovery, creating the CoActive Therapeutic Theater Model, the first manualized model of therapeutic theater, with Dave Mowers. Dr. Wood is passionate about teaching and supervising students to develop into present, attuned, embodied, and critically thinking clinicians.

Recent publications and conference presentations

Beardall, N., Blanc, V., Cardillo, N. J., Karman, S., & Wiles, J. (2016). **Creating the online body: educating dance/movement therapists using a hybrid low-residency model.**

American Journal of Dance Therapy, 38(2), 407-428. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10465-016-9228-y>

Kawano, T., & Chang, M. (2019). **Applying critical consciousness to dance/movement therapy pedagogy and the politics of the body.** *American Journal of Dance Therapy*, 41(2), 234–255.

56th annual national ADTA conference (Online): **Developments in dance/movement therapy education: overview and personal narratives of educators-** Dr. Tomoyo Kawano, Dr. Christina Devereaux, Elise Rischer, Dr. Valerie Blanc, Dr. Wendy Allen, Valerie Hubbs, Dr. Eri Millrod-

Blanc, V. (2021). **The dance of becoming: pedagogy in dance/movement therapy in the United States.** *American Journal of Dance Therapy*

58th annual national ADTA conference Denver, CO, USA, **Dismantling privilege from the inside out: an exploration of the embodiment /expression of whiteness:** Dr. Wendy Allen and Dr. Nancy Beardall, November 2023

Wood, L.L., & Mowers, D. (2019). [The co-active therapeutic theatre model: A manualized approach to creating therapeutic theatre with persons in recovery.](https://doi.org/10.1386/dtr_00003_1) *Drama Therapy Review*, 5(2), 217–234. https://doi.org/10.1386/dtr_00003_1