

Effects of Dance Therapy using Tissue Papers on Mental Health of University Students

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【Abstract】

In this study, catharsis in dance therapy and its effect were discussed using the case study of a group dance therapy workshop for university students with the method of utilizing tissue papers, one of the materials that can promote development of symbolic expressions. The results showed the following: ① The body and mind will be unlocked by improvisational group movements. ② Symbolic work like pulling out contents and release of unconscious worked together to obtain catharsis. ③ When the individual body expressions are made safely in a group, the image will be deepened further and the experience of feeling accepted by each other can be obtained. ④ The feeling of being accepted through one's own expression enhances not only sharing the expression, and sharing the meaning of the context, ⑤ but also motivating for self expression.

【Key words】

dance therapy, catharsis, symbolic activity

1. Introduction — Dance Therapy and Catharsis

Catharsis in clinical psychology, such as psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, play therapy and art therapy, is one of the therapeutic instruments to release deep emotions or piled up emotional conflicts (Freud 1925, 1970, p. 434). Because actualizing energy rhythm of mind and body works especially as a reduction of pain and suffering (Espenak 1979, pp. 71–88), Dance Therapy elicits catharsis as discharge of emotional energy or as pleasure experience through synergistic and rhythmical group activity (Dyrud and Chace 1978, pp. 30–34, Whitehouse 1981), and/or liberation from the “self in reality” through its activities with images and contents of emotions. Particularly, Freudian psychoanalysis evaluates the act of expressing, or more accurately, experiencing the deep emotions often associated with events in the individual's past which had originally been repressed or ignored, and had never been adequately addressed or experienced.

In order to be released from the “self in reality”, it is necessary to get rid of one's own role in reality or to perform another role. Moreover, it is also generally effective to engage in prohibited behaviour

or at least completely unexpected behaviour. But there is often anxiety or resistance to realize these things, which is why such activities should be planned for a fixed time and space with appropriate rules and informed consent.

Control of “me in reality” will be temporarily released and the body comes to take turns with “me” seriously when it is recognized that the environment and conditions are to be kept safe.

In this study, catharsis in dance therapy and its effect will be discussed using the case study of a group dance therapy workshop for university students through the method of utilizing tissue papers (in box), which is one of the materials that can promote the development of symbolic expressions.

2. Methods

(1) Subjects

Subjects were 33 students (7 males and 26 females) in the Social Welfare Faculty who were taking Nursery Teacher qualification course. They participated in the workshop, “Basic Skills I (Dance Therapy)”, as a required subject. All participants were in the second grade, and the average age was 19.42 ± 0.52 years old. The outline of the research and the ethics requirement for the research were explained to the participants, and agreed by all of them.

(2) Reflection Sheet

In order to investigate the psychological process, reflections about the activity were collected using ‘Reflection Sheet’ consisting of five incomplete sentences as below. Students were required to fill in the lacking part of sentences at the end of the workshop.

These five sentences are set to follow subjectively the time course of the activity, and are expected to promote the storage reproduction related to respondent’s internal change. Progress of physical time and a subjective progress condition can be different. However, neither regulations nor the explanation like “at the time you were doing so and so” were done because there was a purpose to gather the record of the change that took place very privately.

- ① When I heard what we are going to do, I immediately thought/felt ().
- ② In the actual activity, at the beginning, I was thinking/feeling ().
- ③ In the actual activity, on the way, I was thinking/feeling ().
- ④ In the actual activity, at the end, I was thinking/feeling ().
- ⑤ Now I am thinking/feeling ().

(3) Organization and analysis of reflections

To investigate possible categories in reflections, the KJ method had been taken:

- ① The words written to completed sentences were copied to paper cards. If there were two or more words of different meaning, we put each into separated cards.
- ② Words and phrases in cards had been read by author and two assistants (female 21 years old and 34

years old who participated in the workshop as observers), and then the classification of the cards was carried out as follows.

- ③ To find categories, words and phrases on cards had been placed so that the distance of the meaning reflected the physical distance and dimension.
- ④ Possible directions of the meaning in the plane/space was examined by two cooperators and the author based on the obtained plane configuration in procedure ③.

(4) Outline of Dance Therapy Workshop

① Selection of Material

It becomes easy to be released from self-consciousness when there is a foothold to handle or masks to hide oneself. Behaviours such as to keep tearing newspapers or making arbitrary sounds which also evoke emotion and image can be a method which induces regression. Newspaper, musical instruments, and the sounds become the object for own projection (they seem to have life, and to have resonance with ones own emotion).

In this study, tissue papers in boxes were chosen as one of the materials that generally tend to causes behaviours which should be “controlled” and also promote aesthetic expression. Pulling out all the tissue papers¹ even though not planning to use them for some purpose and scattering them, will be understood as non-sensical behaviour that should be refrained from in daily life.

② Programs in the Workshop

The 90 minute workshop was planned as follows.

[Warm up] 20min.

- Mirroring: to get closer to the leader and other participants, to get relaxed
- Imitate the movements of newspaper: to become acquainted with variety of movements and to activate individual images.

[Pull Out Tissue Papers!!] 10min.

- While showing boxes of tissue papers, let them talk to each other how we use tissue papers in daily life, or what kind of feeling we have to them.
- Explanation that participants are expected to pull all contents out of boxes in a limited period of time. It was also explained that the winner will be praised. In order not to inhale the dust, hygienic masks were distributed. Then after explanation again, it was allowed that anyone who had a serious anxiety or hesitation would participate only as an observer.
- Three boxes of tissue papers per person had been distrib-



**Fig. 1 A Scene from the workshop
Tissue papers begin to fly high.**

¹ This method of using tissue papers had been originally introduced in the annual congress of the dance therapy society 2006 by Nobuko MATSUNAGA, being modified by the author for the class with her permission.

uted. Participants chose their favourite place and got ready to pull the tissue papers.

- To produce a cheerful and a slightly competitive atmosphere, popular music with a fast tempo was played by CD. As soon as they heard the music, participants started the game. The selected music was “Katteni–Sindbad 勝手にシンドバッド (Southern All Stars)”, “Carmen in Midsummer 真夏のカルメン (coba)”, “Dos A Dos (Adiemus) ”.

【Improvisational Expression with Tissue Papers】 20min.

- Looking at tissue papers around them spread out on the floor, participants were asked “What does it look like?”, “What do you feel now?”. With throwing them up, with touching them, the leader tried to show examples of dancing improvisationally with tissue papers in order to make participants feel free to start dancing. They were allowed to make noise or get involved with others, but they were told that they may not speak to others to avoid breaking individual delicate images.
- For the participants who showed hesitation, the leader tried to induce them using phrases like: “it could be one chance to grant your wish since your childhood”, “you are really allowed to behave like you imagine”, “What have you long wished to do, if you could?”. Watching carefully, the leader supported free exploration in images and behaviours, using phrases like: “Yea! You got it. There are more new ways to play with them!”, “Wow, it is becoming ***! ”, “What does it look like!?”.
- After a certain exciting time when the participants begin to look at surroundings and to talk to the nearby person, the music changed into sentimental and solemn style. Music with poetic sentiment and/or feeling of stillness were chosen for this activity such as “Remembering Me (S.E.N.S.)”, “Opening (Phillip Glass)”, “Thanksgiving (George Winston) ”, “Spiegel Im Spiegel (Arvo Pärt) ”.

【Search for own Themes】 15min.

- After trial of improvisational expressions, participants were asked to look back at images and movements that developed in the activity, and to choose the one that they wanted to play or deepen again.
- Leader listened to each favourite images reported by participants, and depending upon the types of images, she made participants into sub groups so that each image could be realized in the form of dance expression.

【Bring Your Feeling into Words/Reflection】 25min.

- All tissue papers had been gathered and put into plastic bags (garbage bag XL size on the market), and the space returned to the place which usually has different purpose (gym for Jap. Martial Arts) .
- The participants had been asked to verbalize their experiences in three stages:
 - ① “Share” their impression of the activity with others.
 - ② “Feedback” from other participants who became audience and/or the leader.
 - ③ Fill the Reflection Sheet.

4. Results and Discussion

The words that appeared in the “Reflection Sheet” that showed the internal change during the activity (See Table 4-Table 8 at the end of article) were listed in order of frequency.

These words had been classified, and the result of examining the relations of the word groups are shown in Figure 2 through Figure 5. Hereafter, the process was traced and examined, how feelings appeared, were released and noticed, based on the description in the Reflection Sheet and on what appeared as movement.

(1) Encounter Own Controls

At first, as they heard the leader's announcement, the participants were surprised at the unexpected theme of the activity. Moreover, there were a lot of participants who had doubt or negative feelings like "Is it really allowed?" or "What a waste!?". While there was a resistance to the activity, there were also curiosity and affirmative feelings (Figure 2).

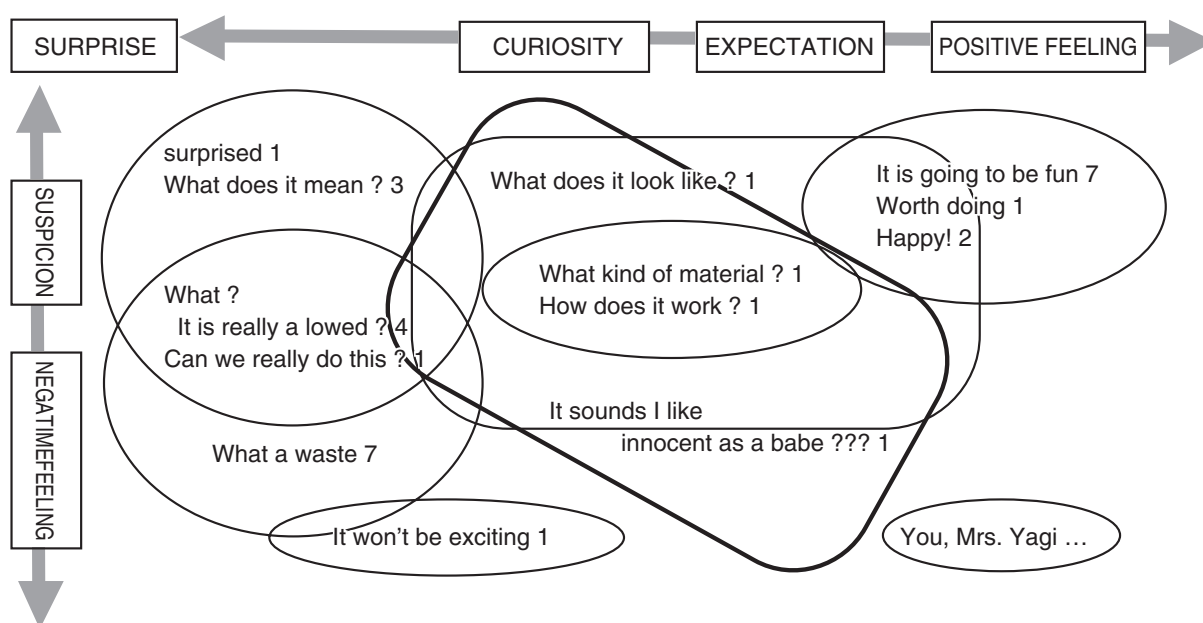


Fig. 2 Responses to the Sentence ① “When I heard what we are going to do, I immediately thought / felt ().”

(2) Struggle against Self-consciousness

The student who had curiosity and affirmative feelings took the lead and acted positively when it actually started. Then there gradually emerged those who released a bit of own control “because I looked around and found many who were playing without hesitation”, and also who felt “it is embarrassing” but at the same time also became absorbed. Among these comments it can be observed that they broke into such a “strange” and “ambivalent” situation with total SELF “in a trance” and saying inside “What have I got to lose here now? I’m going to try anything!” (Figure 3). It is impossible to show this passage at physical time. However, as the first tissue boxes became completely empty, the concentration level of the group got higher, and there emerged participants who forgot their surroundings instinctively and cried out meaningless words.

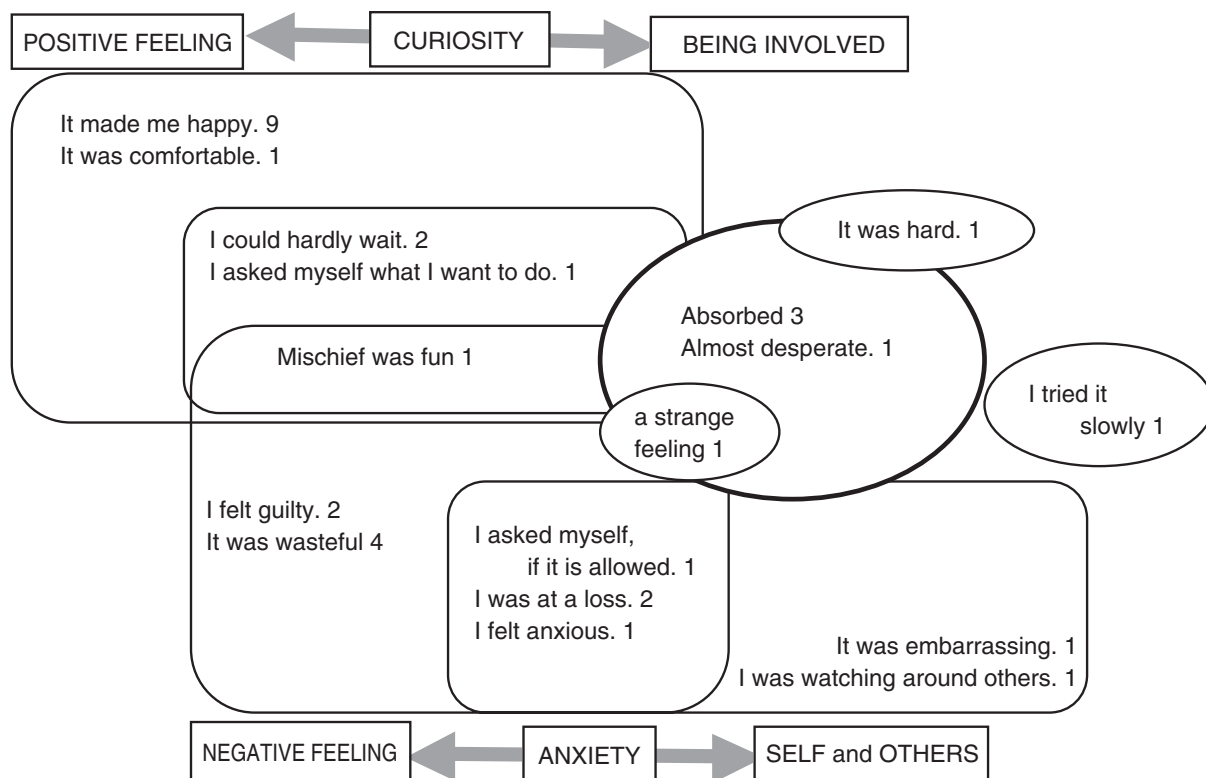


FIG. 3 Responses to the Sentence ② “In the actual activity, at the beginning, I was thinking / feeling ().”

(3) Being Involved in Own Body and SELF

Through moving arms and hands “deep in activity” and “struggling” to throw tissue papers, chest has been moved naturally, breathing deepened and feelings became heated, as well as “happy” feeling increasing. Among excited participants, there were some who experienced “head ache”.

As tissue papers were being pulled out more and more, or after having finished pulling out the tissue paper, the participants voluntarily began, or they were waiting impatiently, to throw tissue papers high or to throw them out to someone. Their view was interrupted with tissue papers that flew up in an instant. It could be assumed therefore that their sense of the world would shift into unreality or fantasy and their excitement would heighten. There emerged aggressive and asocial behaviours which must be prohibited and controlled in real life (“I do what I want to do!”), for example to tear tissue papers powerfully in pieces, step on them and stomp with all strength, throw papers out against someone, run around screaming, or play alone hidden in papers without caring about others. As the leader noticed these tendencies, she accepted these expressions and brought into verbal expression what they were doing.

In Figure 4 we can see the words “comfortable”, “like being back in childhood”, “safe, released”, “relaxed” or “sleepy”, that indicate that there occurred psychological regression. On the other hand, there were also verbal expressions like “beautiful”, “it was getting interesting to find my own invention” or “intellectual excitement”, which indicate that they enjoyed creative and aesthetic experiences. Although there were partially also feelings of fatigue or stressed, but overall, they felt “it is great!”.

and that “want to be here as now we are, all the time”, through experiencing their body perceptions and the emotion evoked from them.

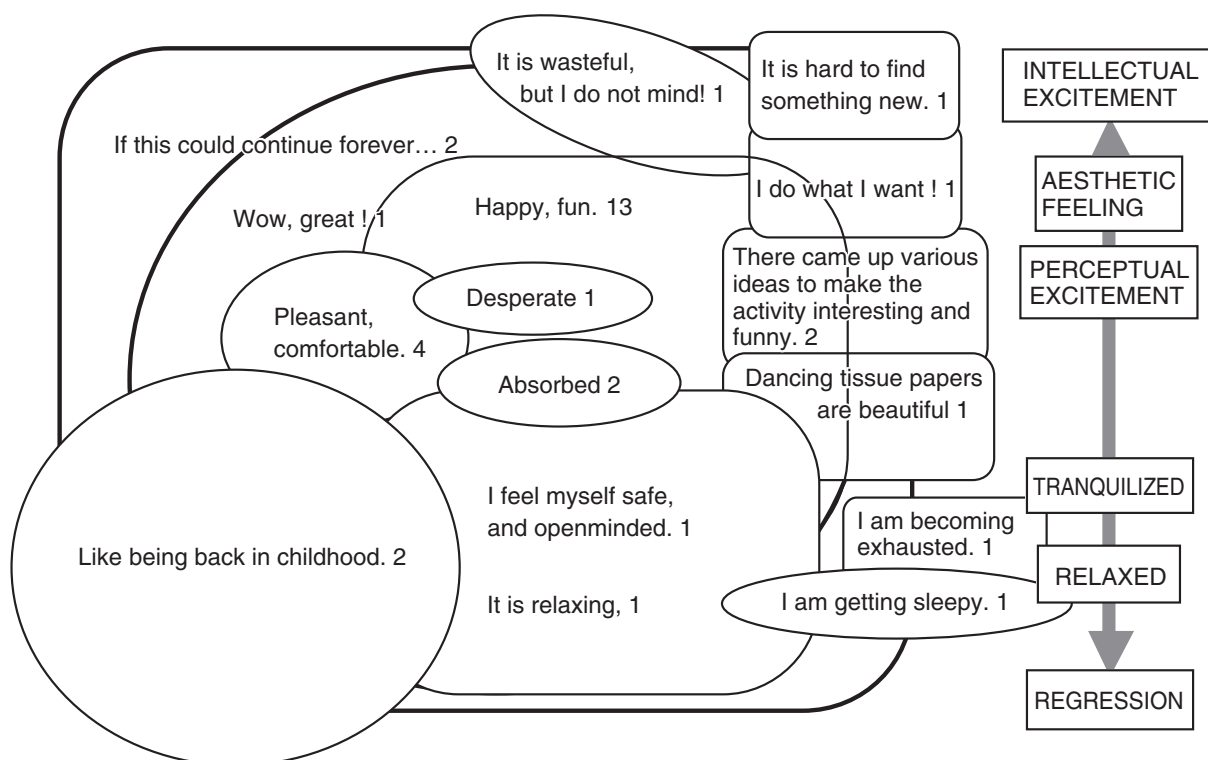


Fig. 4 Responses to the Sentence ③ “In the actual activity, on the way, I was thinking/ feeling ().”

(4) Enjoying Images

They began to handle tissue papers in slow movements, to pass creeping under the tissue papers, lie down on tissue papers or compare tissue papers to something such like flower petals, snowflakes and so on. The images they had were for example, “snow field“, “a funeral service” associated from “bury” and colour of holiness and dignity, “fountain gushes out there”. Once they had their own image or were attracted by images of others’, their individual expression had a way to path to emerge. In shamanic or Jungian therapy, clients are led to death (Lewis 1988) or rebirth (Bernstein 1981) in a symbolic way, which causes regression and chaos into unconsciousness. This is known as a technique to be utilized.

The last phase in such a therapeutic workshop in general should be done (or prepared?) so that the participants can reach an emotional conclusion and shift back into the real life. That was the reason that the leader prepared large plastic gabage bags, which could actually lead them to put the tissue papers away and dispose of them. This phenomenon can also be explained in Affordance Theory which James J. Gibson (1979, 1986), and in Japan Masato SASAKI (1994), introduced to explain a quality of an object, or an environment, that allows an individual to perform an action, as well as the case that we ought to pull tissue papers out of the box so far as we are allowed. This behaviour led the partici-

pants to feel “Slowly, we are reaching to the end of this activity.” They were watching the change, that much of tissue papers even like a mountain or a carpet went into several plastic bags in seconds, and now they stood as compressed garbage in front of them.

Meanwhile, participants were remembering the private image which developed within the activity. And they thought that they “imagined various worlds”, and “would rather not go back to real life”. There were also comments like “want to take these tissue papers away as a souvenir” or “Tissue papers make me feel warm” that indicate that they gave a certain meaning to tissue papers. Sense of “accomplishment”, “Enough”, and “Satisfaction” were also experienced (Figure 5).

The comment “I felt, I could get closer to all other fellow students” deserves attention. This kind of comment, in which the participant was aware of relationship with others was not observed in the former phase. It could be assumed that after the period of total individual and perceptual involvement, she surveyed the time and the space which she had, and remembered her images which had been brought into the nonverbal expression, and at the end she recognized the “others” as the environmental factor that made it possible for her to become involved. Her sense of relationship with these friends could have been strengthened.

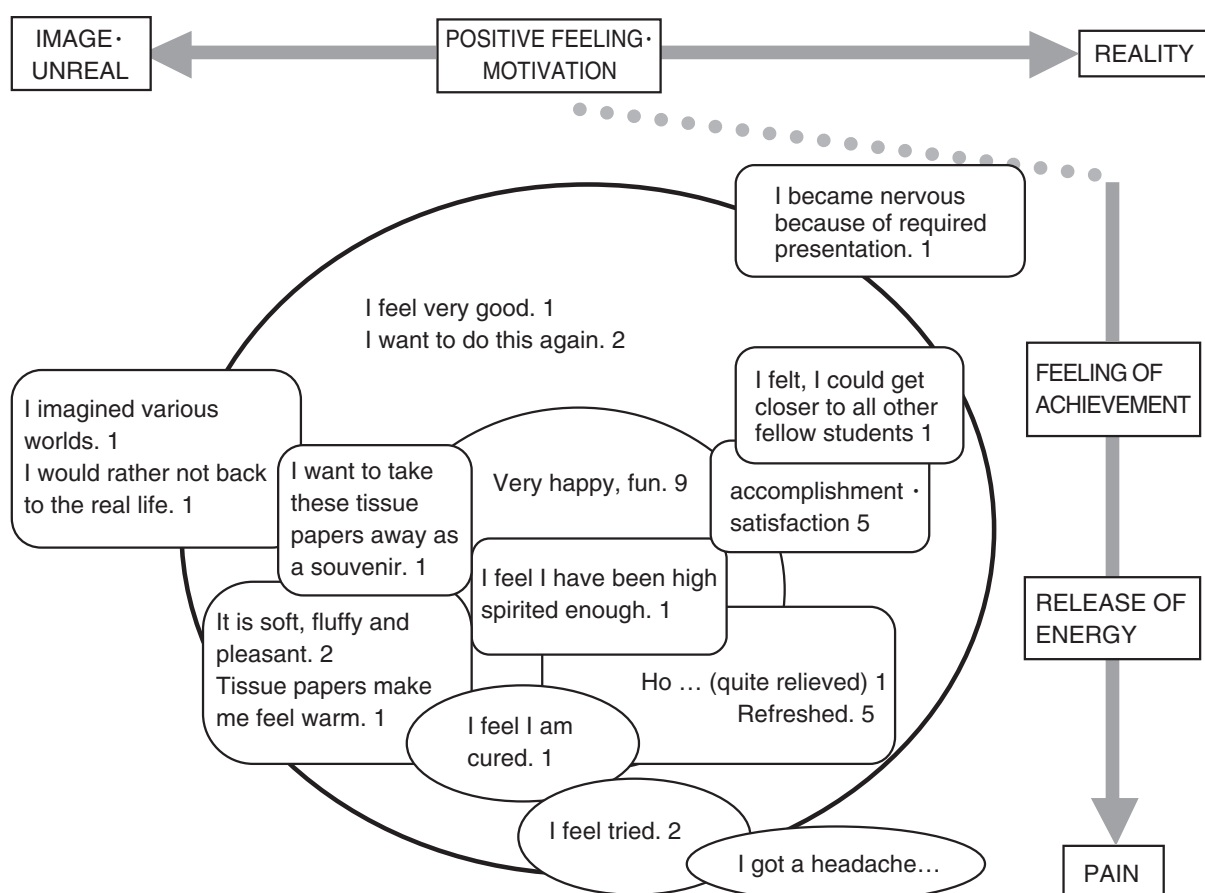


Fig. 5 Responses to the Sentence ④ “In the actual activity, at the end, I was thinking/feeling ().”

(5) Remembered Images

The participants were asked to remember the images which were played in improvisational expressions, and which they were most likely to express again. Different as mentioned in the phase “(3) Being Involved in Own Body and SELF”, moderate images (Table 1) rather than aggressive ones have survived at the end of improvisation. Aggressiveness and excessive emotions and surplus energy could be drawn out or processed enough through the realization of images in intensive movements, then after completion, they became still and the images could be kept and saved through such qualities as “spring up”, “be wrapped”, “warm”, “bright”, “light” and “lives in another life”.

Table 1 Images emerged in activity

- well, fountain
- snow, snow shelter
- feather
- inside of the Tissue-Paper-Mountain was bright / warm...
- fairy land
- grave yard in a flower garden
- I am filled with tissue papers like a fat man/snow man/garbage bag ⇒ all tissues will be exhausted all at once and I'm going to transform

(6) Five Emotional Components After Activity

After the body expression activities were over, the comments on the experiences were shared in small groups and then in the entire class, inclusive of the leader. Figure 6 shows feeling “now” at the moment after the sharing.

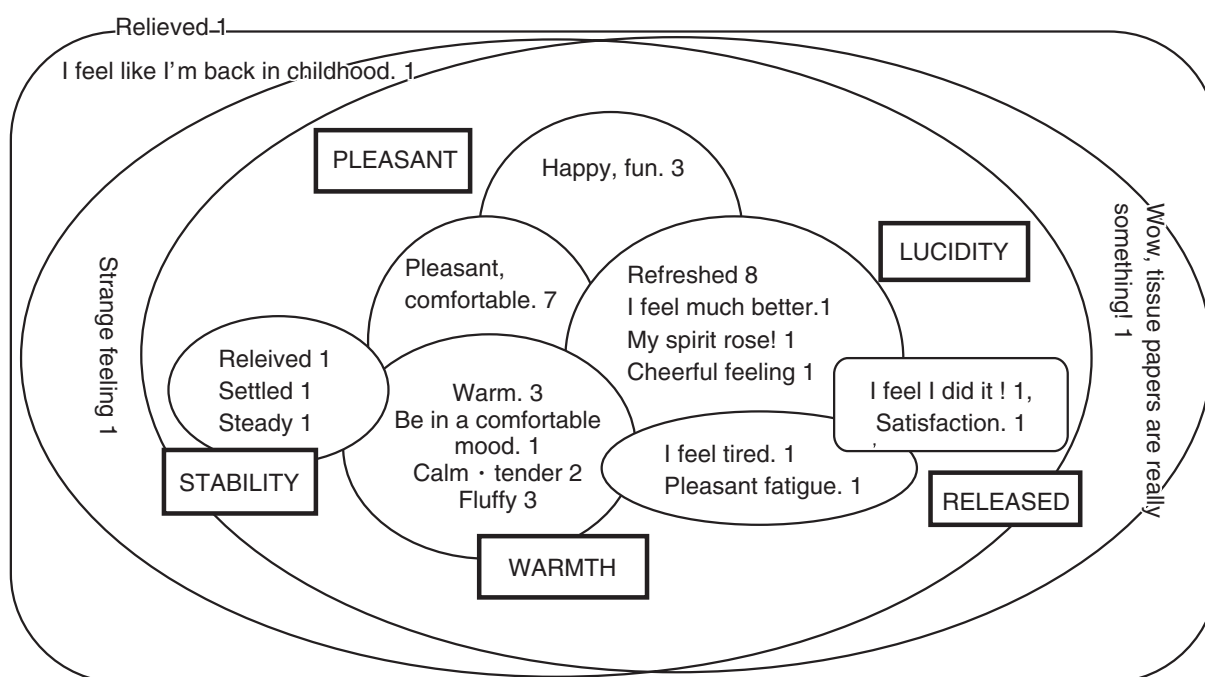


Fig. 6 Responses to the Sentence ⑤ “After all, I am now thinking/ feeling ().”

Comments which varied widely in former phases (1) through (5) converged into five core elements; PLEASANT such as “happy” and “fun”, LUCIDITY, like “refreshed”, “feel better” and “My spirit rose!”, RELEASED such as “I feel I did it!”, “pleasant fatigue”, WARMTH as “warm”, “comfortable”, and STABILITY as well as “settled”, “relieved”. And all these are based on “back in childhood days”.

(7) Participants’ Evaluation of the Program

Participants were requested to evaluate the total program through the question “What do you think of this kind of program?”. Table 2 shows the result as frequency of the type of the comments. Comments can be roughly categorized into six types; General affirmation, motivated to repeat this experience, view point for new direction, effects on mental health, view point from skill for supporting body expression, and negative evaluation. The act that there was a participant who experienced this workshop rather negatively should be followed by discussion about whether the group might be too large, and/or from the view point of her/his development through the entire plan of 15 weekly sessions.

Table 2 Participants’ Evaluation of the Program

(N = 33 there were cases in which more than two semantic phrases.)

Category	Comments	Frequency
General affirmation 15	It makes me feel (too) happy	6
	I think, it is good.	4
	It is a good experience.	3
	excellent	1
	I like it	1
Motivated to repeat this experience 15	I would like to do it again. I would like to do it more.	6
	It can be interesting/ good once a year/ for a change.	6
	So far we know it is not good, we may do it once a year at most.	1
	If it is more ecological, I would like to do it again and again.	1
	We need such thing sometimes ...	1
View point for new direction 13	At the begining I thought it is too wastefull/ not ecological/ not gentle for the community, but ...	9
	We need very much courage to do to one’s heart’s content something which has been forbidden.	1
	Feelings that it is too wasteful should be forgot for a while.	1
	It is good because it is refreshing.	1
	I felt happy to find a new play for fun.	1
Effects on mental health 5	Those who are irritated and touchy are recomended to do this.	1
	I think, through this program, we get relaxed and close enough to talk something which is usally difficult to express to each other.	1
	We would better to experience like this in childhood.	1
	Other people should also try this!!	1
	I am cured.	1
View point from skill for supporting body expression 2	This method is good rather for beginning phase in dance education.	1
	Easy to be involved and move own body.	1
Negative evaluation 1	Because it becomes dusty, not good for health.	1
Number of Comments		51

5. Discussion — Effect of Catharsis and Motivation to Self-expression in the beginning stage of Dance Therapy

The therapeutic process in this dance therapy workshop progressed as follows.

To be confronted with the (partially) great difficulties in the behaviour, to pull three packages of tissue papers without purpose and to keep throwing the contents out, led them to being confronted with the difficulties in expressing own emotions or images, and even with sense of guilt.

By doing it in a group, each individual got the backup of the group to decide to exceed a certain barrier. The participants came to be able to enjoy the freedom of the maximum expression that came from a so-called standard and was allowed for a while. Moreover, they came to be able to enjoy allowing others' free behaviour and maximum expressions, too.

In the next stage, they experienced that there could be various interpretations for the contents of their own experiences, in this case tissue papers and the box, by intent playing with the images that have arisen in themselves. For instance, they find the facts that emotional expressions that are usually not allowed and accepted, like tearing up, throwing them against something in oneself, or that mysterious and unidentified emotions are not necessarily bad. It is thought that psychological energy was released through conversions of these "strange" emotions into physical energy as an intention. To share one's own experience and to feedback each other afterwards were useful for making the qualities and character to request from their own group or environment such as "Pleasant", "Stability", "Lucidity", "Release", and "Warmth" from sense of relief. In addition, the quality of emotions which are brought into verbal expression here is corresponding to "feeling unburdened", which can be brought about by catharsis.

After all, more than the half of the participants reported that they felt they were "Motivated to repeat this experience" in such words as: "I would like to do it again. I would like to do it more" and "It can be interesting/ good once a year/ for a change." There were also certain number of recommendations that this activity should be introduced for example for "those who are irritated and touchy", and reports on the awareness of the influence on mental health, such as "get relaxed and close enough to say something which is usually difficult to express to each other".

This progress is to be resumed as follows:

- ① The body and mind will be unlocked by improvisational group movements.
- ② Symbolic work like putting out contents and release of unconscious worked together to obtain catharsis.
- ③ When the individual body expressions are made in a group safely, the image will be caused further and the experience of feeling accepted by each other can be obtained.



Fig. 7 A Scene from the workshop "I have been longing to being covered with snow white tissue papers for long time...!"

- ④ The feeling of being accepted in own expression enhances not only the sharing of the expression, but also sharing of the meaning of the context,
- ⑤ and also motivating for self expression.

These Steps have been understood as a therapeutic influence on mental health.

Psychiatrist ISHIFUKU, who evaluated dance therapy early in Japan, reported that discharging of physical energy concomits the release of emotions and so brings catharsis, and the feeling of being accepted is expected to lead the patients to notice a sense of community or mutuality among human beings (1983). These tendencies have been found also in the workshop in this study, the former was in phase ① and ②, the latter was in ③ through ⑤. Disunity or schizos caused by artificial trick made by societies and present regime, can be crossed and bridged while we are dancing (Vogine, Ichikawa 1977). On the level of this study, this situation was experienced at the beginning, where they confronted difficulties in the behaviour of pulling tissue papers out without purpose. In a safe time-space they could let themselves go along, 'affordance', and found a certain balance between own nature and society.

For example Roth's method (1998) has a concrete path with five dancing stages that leads us to unify ourselves. Roth presents five rhythms to express, meaning five emotional stages to experience, such as flowing, staccato, chaos, lyrical, stillness. Through experiencing these five qualities, we obtain also varied releases: by flowing, the path way of energy flow should be found, staccato, letting us find our own passion and energy, while chaos bridges poles of any qualities, lyrical is for poetic action and stillness is for looking back at the way you have come (Roth 1998, pp. 166-70). These can also explain the progress and effects found in the dance therapy workshop in this study.

6. Conclusion

In this study, the catharsis in dance therapy and its effect were discussed using the case study of dance therapy workshop for university students with the technique utilizing tissue papers (in box) as one of the materials that can promote the development of symbolic expressions. This study involved a rather large number of participants, which was why the individual emotions could not be really handled. But it is surmised that independent from the settings, as group or individual, clients or students, body movements, emotions and images are connected directly. These special properties were utilized in the dance therapy workshop for the university students and the activity with tissue papers revealed the effect of catharsis, like breaking barriers against self expression, against the release, against others, by dancing in the form of pulling out the contents of oneself.

In actuality, whether the condition can be created, in which this connection can be experienced, and the emotional experience can be deepened in given time and space, are keys that decide the success of a dance therapy session.

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Table 3 ① When I heard what we are going to do, I immediately thought/felt ().

Responses	Frequency
It is going to be fun.	7
wasteful	7
What? It is really allowed?	4
What does it mean?	3
Happy!	2
It sounds like what babies do ...	1
Worth doing	1
surprised	1
How does it work?	1
What kind of material?	1
What does it look like?	1
Can we really do this?	1
It won't be exciting.	1
You, Mrs. Yagi ...	1
TOTAL	32

Table 4 ② In the actual activity, at the beginning, I was thinking / feeling ().

Responses	Frequency
It makes me happy.	9
I thought it is wasteful.	4
was absorbed	3
I was at a loss.	2
I felt guilty.	2
I could hardly wait.	2
Mischief was fun	1
I asked myself, if it is allowed.	1
It was embarrassing.	1
It was a strange feeling.	1
Almost desperate.	1
It was hard.	1
I was watching around others.	1
It was comfortable.	1
I tried it slowly	1
I felt anxious.	1
I asked myself what I want to do.	1
TOTAL	33

Table 5 ③ In the actual activity, on the way, I was thinking/feeling ().

Responses	Frequency
Happy, fun.	13
Pleasant, comfortable.	4
There came up various ideas to make the activity interesting and funny.	2
Would like to stay so.	2
Like being back in childhood.	2
absorbed	2
Dancing tissue papers are beautiful	1
It is wasteful, but I do not mind!	1
I feel myself safe, and openminded	1
It is relaxing.	1
Wow, great!	1
I do what I want!	1
It is hard to find something new ...	1
I am becoming exhausted.	1
I am becoming sleepy.	1
I am doing this desperately ...	1
TOTAL	35

Table 6 ④ In the actual activity, at the end, I was thinking/feeling ().

Responses	Frequency
Very happy, fun.	9
Refreshed.	5
Sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.	5
I want to do this again.	2
It is soft, fluffy and pleasant.	2
I am tired.	2
I feel very good.	1
I want to take these tissue papers away as a souvenir.	1
Tissue papers make me feel warm.	1
imagined various worlds.	1
would rather not back to the real life	1
I felt, I could get closer to all other fellow students	1
I became nervous because of required presentation.	1
Hoh ... (I felt quite relieved)	1
"I got a headache".	1
I feel I am cured.	1
I feel I have been high spirited enough.	1
TOTAL	36

Table 7 ⑤ Now I am thinking/feeling ().

Responses	Frequency
Refreshed	8
Pleasant, comfortable.	7
Happy, fun.	3
Warm	3
Fluffy	3
Calm · gentle	2
My spirit rose!	1
I feel much better.	1
Cheerful feeling	1
Be in a comfortable mood.	1
Relieved ...	1
Settled	1
Steady	1
I feel tired.	1
Pleasant fatigue.	1
Great!	1
I feel I did it!	1
Satisfaction.	1
I feel like I'm back in childhood.	1
Strange feeling	1
Wow, tissue papers are really something!	1
TOTAL	41