

Dancing in and with Nature Final Abstract and Paper

Dr. Eline Kieft

Coventry University, United Kingdom; Eline.Kieft@coventry.ac.uk

Abstract

Background/objectives

This workshop combines nature and movement, both of which offer a potential to enhance wellbeing. Exposure to nature has physical and psychological benefits, while moving both as a physical activity and also as a form of art has the capacity to uplift, and contribute to meaning.

Methodology

Participants will explore the outdoor environment through a form of embodied, moving mindfulness meditation to reconnect with self, others and the world around.

Results

Focusing on the senses to expand our awareness and explore movement as a way of knowing allows the body to become an antenna, fine-tuned to pick up information both from within and from outside the body. This contributes to increased presence, taking stock, and coming back in touch with our imagination, creativity and sources of inspiration.

Practical note

No previous dance experience necessary, simply bring a lively curiosity. We will be moving outdoors, so please come prepared for any type of weather!

Facilitator

Eline has over 30 years of experience with various dance styles, including professional training in contemporary dance. She is a qualified Movement Medicine teacher and completed her PhD in dance anthropology at the University of Roehampton in 2013, on dance, empowerment, spirituality and wellbeing. She creates a space in which new resources and inspiration can be accessed to facilitate change, and offers tailor made arrangements for individuals, universities, care organisations, schools, businesses and intergenerational groups. Please visit her website on www.elinekieft.com for further background information.

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Extended Abstract / Short Paper

Eline Kieft

Coventry University, United Kingdom; Eline.Kieft@coventry.ac.uk

1/ Regardless of personal preferences for and qualities of different landscapes, the beneficial and even therapeutic influence of nature on health is becoming more and more acknowledged (Hartig et al., 2014, Bell et al., 2015, Kieft and Hassink, 2004). A sense of disconnection and isolation from nature is often seen as one of the underlying causes of un-wellbeing, and many authors call for a renegotiation of our relationship with the natural world in order to address 'symptoms' of this time (Fraleigh, 2000: 54, Shusterman, 2000: 162, Lemaire, 2002). Nature as a concept has meant different things to different people over time, and there are multiple ways of interpreting and participating in nature (Greenwood, 2005: 39).

2/ Dance is such a way, which enables an intimate relationship to self and the inner landscape, including emotions, ideology and understanding of cosmology, but also with the world around us. We become aware of our concrete relationship with the earth (gravity), the sky (vertical alignment), air (breath) and space; and highlight our position in a wide network of social, cultural, environmental and even political relationships. Through the dance, these relationships are not only established and maintained, but possibly also transformed (Henry et al., 2000: 257).

3/ To dance *in* nature amplifies these inherent connections to dance. Nature provides a mirror that we do not exist in isolation. Through the seasons and the cycles of growth and decay, it offers strong metaphors of (our) cyclic nature (Kieft, 2013). Nature is a place where we can utterly be ourselves, as it does not play games or requires us to perform specific 'roles'. It simply is, and as such gives a sense of permission to explore the benefits of this 'wild medicine', allowing it to nurture those parts that often have become obscured in our identities shaped by culture and its appropriate and expected rules of behaviour.

4/ An increased sensory awareness can mediate and shape 'social knowledge and values' (Howes, 2008: 445), and the body is becoming increasingly recognised as a site that generates knowing (Nabhan-Warren, 2011: 384, Kieft and Blades, 2016) and ground for the relational exchange between self and other, insider and outsider (Reeve, 2011).

5/ Through gentle, embodied, mindful moving in the immediate outdoors, we will focus on our senses, to reconnect with self, others and the world around. This workshop will be a playful exploration of our innate capacities as human beings, to fine-tune our bodies as antennae to pick up information both from within and from outside the body, blending a variety of sensory techniques, simple movement principles and shamanic tools for seeing nature as a teacher. All ages and abilities welcome, no previous dance experience required, simply bring a lively curiosity. We will be moving outside, so please come prepared for any type of weather!

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