

# Narrative Inquiry of Dance Based Narrative Therapy as a Non-pharmaceutical Intervention for People with Dementia: A Practice Field of Relational Responsibility

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## Objective

In 2020, out of 50 million people who are diagnosed with dementia, approximately 270,000 of them are over 65 years of age, which is a challenge for social care in the 21st century (Ministry of Interior, 2020; Department of Medical Affairs, Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2017; World Health Organization, 2020). Characterized by impaired brain function, dementia leads to the deterioration and disintegration of cognition, memory, and emotional regulation. It significantly affects the daily life and mental health of the affected individual. At present, the effect of drug treatment is limited. Therefore, non-pharmacological treatment is a crucial part of dementia care (Department of Medical Affairs, Ministry of Health and Welfare., 2017). The average course of the disease is 8 to 10 years. Not only the people diagnosed with dementia but also caregivers can face severe life changes. The relationship between the caregivers and people with dementia can cause enormous physical and psychological pressure on the caregiver. From the Relational Responsibility point of view, people construct their daily actions through cycles of Ritualization, Standardization, Beliefs and Values Formation, and Coordination through interaction (Figure 1). If people are more aware of the relational being process, they can reconstruct their interactions by adjusting their habitual responses (McNamee, 2014).

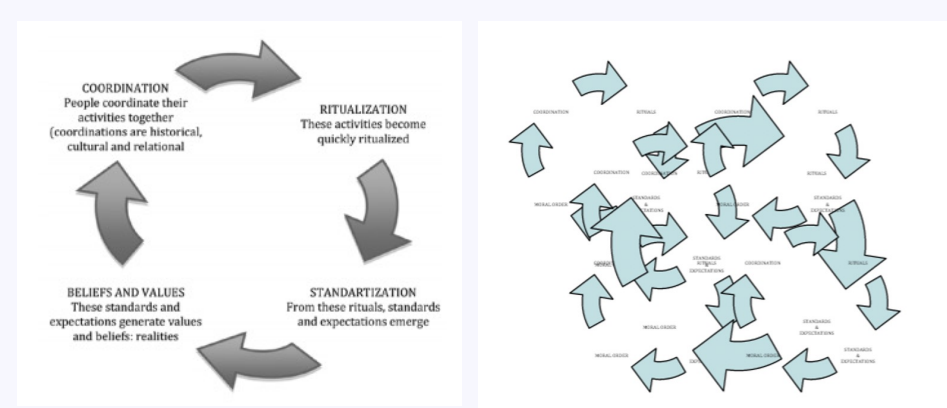


Figure 1: the Relational Responsibility  
Note: from McNamee, 2009

Dance/ Movement Therapy (DMT) utilizes the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive, and physical integration, improving the health and well-being of individuals (American Dance Therapy Association, 2020). Laban movement analysis (LMA) is a framework used in one of the intervention models of DMT (Karkou & Meekums, 2017). Dance-Based Narrative Therapy (DBNT) uses both verbal and nonverbal (body movement) language as a comprehensive dialogue for understanding problems and their effects on people's lives (Hong, 2022).

World Health Organization (2019) believes that DMT has positive effects on the physiological, psychological, and social well-being of people with dementia (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). According to research, DMT does have the advantage of helping people in expressing emotions and interacting with the outside world whereby increasing inter-relationship awareness, cognition, emotion, and sociality (American Dance Therapy Association, 2020; Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Ho, Cheung, Chan, Cheung, & La., 2015; Ho et al. 2020; Karkou & Meekums, 2017; Stanton, 1991).

Since 2020, the researchers of this study have combined dance therapy with narrative therapy to work with the elderly population affected by dementia in Taiwan. The researchers have found significant changes in participants when the DBNT group leader incorporated their professional "mainstream" attitudes with the following perspectives: (1) not allowing diagnosis to limit patient's abilities, (2) awakening body consciousness through the principle of simplicity and repetition, and (3) being aware of the group dynamic influences. The participants have the following transformation processes: (1) from taking it for granted to discovering the presence and support from the body, (2) from an inflexible posture to the natural flow of movement, and (3) from loneliness to resonance and connection (Hong, Chen, & Liu, 2022). This study further focuses on the relational process narrative when the caregiver and people diagnosed with dementia dance together.

This study is based on the theoretical knowledge of co-construction and the experiences of practice (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba 2011; McNamee, 2014).

## Method

- Narrative inquiry is the study design.
- In collaboration with a dementia center at a hospital in Taipei City, Taiwan, ten pairs of caregivers and their dementia patients participated in twenty Dance Based Narrative Therapy (DBNT) group sessions.
- Data collection: group records, audio-visual materials, session note sand reflection notes.
- Analysis: Using "Categorical - Content" analysis to focus on the 'Relational Responsibility' theme (Figure 1, 2 & 3).
- Ethics: The study was performed as a collaborative effort with a dementia center at a hospital in Taipei City, Taiwan. Participant recruitment and the conduct of the group sessions were performed in accordance with the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Taipei (No. IRB-2020-045).
- The DBNT Group Leader: The first researcher is the group leader for this study's DBNT group sessions. She has an M.A. in dance education and a Ph.D. in counseling and guidance. For 14 years, she worked full-time as an occupational therapist in a psychiatric hospital in central Taiwan. She has nearly 20 years of DMT practice and teaching experience and has 520 hours of training for the LMA certificate.

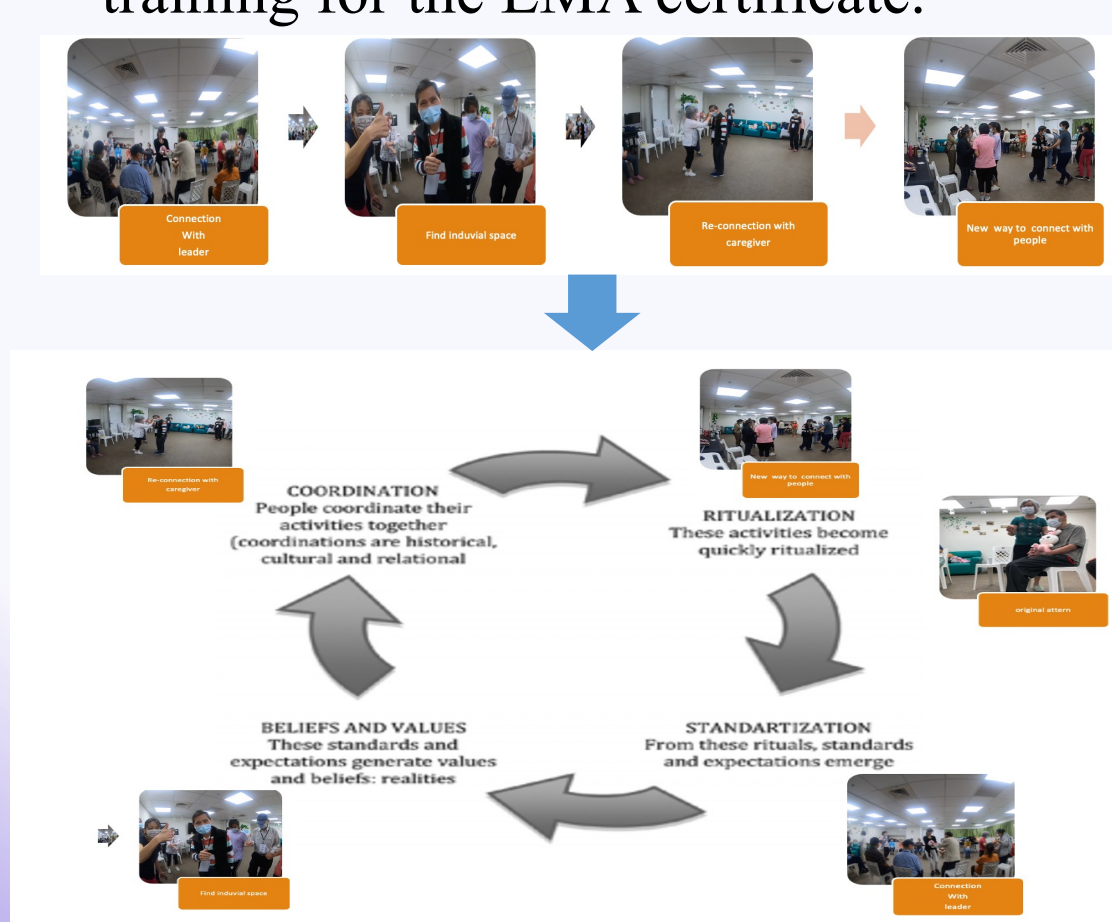


Figure 2 context  
Note: by author

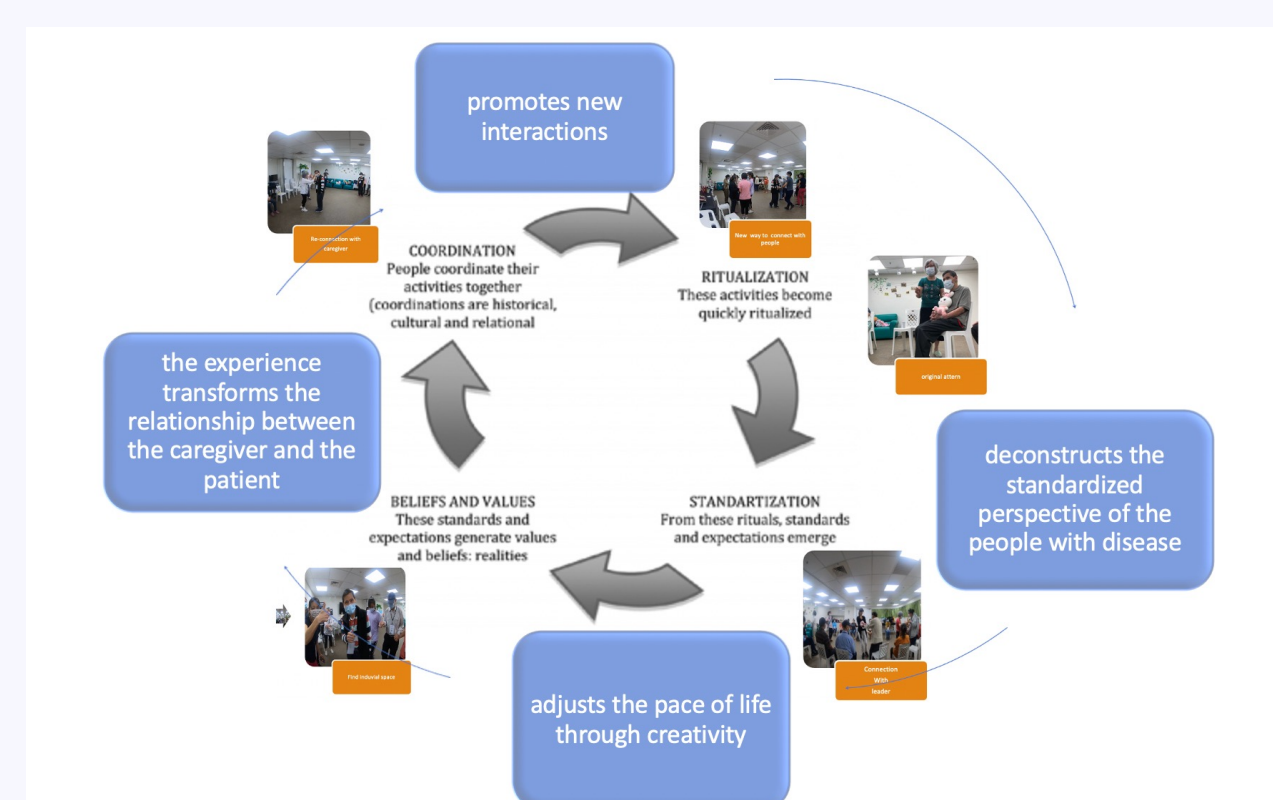


Figure 3 categorical  
Note: by author

## Results

DBNT offers opportunities for embodied expression through the construction of ritualized bodily movements. Old ways of seeing each other and old methods of dialogue are all refreshed from the process of creative body movements. For example, holding two fingers like a 'V' can symbolize wanting to cut off from outside connection and return to their own body space and self. The embodied experiences provided new perspectives and ways to interact between caregivers and Dementia patients

1. The experience transforms the relationship between the caregiver and the patient
  - the caregiver is aware of the space they also need when taking care of the patient; at the same time, they also recognize that the care receiver still can respond outside world by using their way
2. Deconstructs the standardized perspective of the people with disease
  - neglected disease diagnosis predicts the possibility of degeneration, but body movements and caregivers can help re-expand the relationship with diagnosis.
3. Promotes new interactions
  - the rhythmic interaction from social dancing provides an interactive stage beyond the verbal language
4. Adjust the pace of life through creativity
  - the rhythms and movements of dancing can be creatively incorporated into daily life actions

## Conclusion

DBNT provides a space for social dancing with added elements of body-mind awareness and dialogue in multiple discourses in the meaning-remaking journeys (McNamee, 2014). Since this study does not manipulate the acceptance criteria and focuses on the process of co-construction, it is difficult to avoid the subjectivity of the researcher. However, the inner voices of the participant can not be ignored as their transformations had multiple turning points. Physical ability is one of the last abilities to be affected by dementia, but patients can create new and easy embodied expressions in their daily lives. Most of the caretaker participants in this study are middle-aged women. Oftentimes, the women from this generation interpret "care" as "What can't be cured must be endured." During this group process, they are not only observing the symptoms of their patients but also discovering the patient's new abilities.

As humans, we are relational beings because we are all influenced by our interactions with others and cannot avoid the power of relationships (McNamee & Gergen, 1999). DBNT can encourage caregivers to pay attention and notice that their relations with patients can flexibly move in two ways. This study shows that with DBNT, the caregiver can care for themselves while healing their patients, creating new experiences in the Dementia caretaking process.

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Narrative Inquiry of Dance Based Narrative Therapy as a Non-pharmaceutical  
Intervention for People with Dementia: A Practice Field of Relational  
Responsibility

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Taiwan is becoming a super-aging society. For the 65 years and older population, about 1 in 13 people has been diagnosed with dementia. While the mainstream focuses on the treatments of dementia and delaying its debilitating effects, not enough attention is given to help people deal with the daily psychological and physical consequences of the disease. Under post-modern social constructionism, Dance Based Narrative Therapy (DBNT) integrates Dance/Movement Therapy and Narrative Therapy by utilizing body movement to diversify the dialogue process.

This study collaborated with a Taipei City hospital, where ten pairs of caregivers and their dementia patients were the participants. Through 20 DBNT group sessions, their group records, audio-visual materials, and reflection notes were collected using narrative inquiry as the research design and analyzed through “Categorical-Content” to focus on their experiences.

Through constructing ritualistic body movements that symbolize self-body space, (1) the experience transforms the relationship between the caregiver and the patient, (2) deconstructs the standardized view of the disease, (3) promotes new interactions, and (4) adjusts the pace of life through creativity. DBNT provides a place for “body movement /dance and verbal language” that promotes present self-awareness and creates an embodiment experience of relational dialogue. The caregivers no longer regarded themselves as the only ones with responsibility as they formed a bond with

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their patients, facing the challenges in life as a team. Those elders with dementia regained their ability to express themselves.

Key word: Dementia, Relational Responsibility, Dance Therapy, Caregiver