Introduction to the Expressive Arts
Open lecture by Lorena B. Fernandez MA
2010

This presentation offers an introduction to the Expressive Arts for (1) healing, (2) problem-solving and (3) building resilience in task-oriented communities.

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What are the Expressive Arts?

The Expressive Arts combine the visual arts, movement, drama, music, writing and other creative processes to foster deep personal growth and community development.

For more Info visit International Expressive Arts Therapy Association - www.IEATA.org

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What are the Expressive Arts?

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The field of Expressive Arts is developing into an evolving multimodal approach within psychology, organizational development, community arts and education.

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What are the Expressive Arts?

By integrating the arts processes and allowing one to flow into another, we gain access to our inner resources for healing, clarity, illumination and creativity.

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What are the Expressive Arts?

Collage workshop facilitated by Lorena B. Fernandez MA

Sharing our artistic expression in safety

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Who can use the Expressive Arts?

1. All of Us!! The Expressive Arts can be helpful for every person for self-discovery and healing. We all have an innate capacity and a need to be creative. They can be healing in programs servicing the elderly, children, refugees, veterans, individuals living with health issues and persons who suffered abuse.

2. The Expressive Arts can be helpful in solving problems, conflict resolution and brainstorming in a wide range of business, professional, and educational settings.

3. The Expressive Arts can be helpful in teambuilding, to strengthen the resilience of the team, to establish and retain its well-being and to activate resources and a sense of coherence within the team.

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Three Approaches to the Expressive Arts

1. **The Expressive Arts for Healing**: Uses the arts as therapy to (1) heal unresolved issues from the past and (2) to releasing difficult emotions, such as fear and anger, therefore helping sustain the healing process of persons enduring challenges.

2. **The Expressive Arts for Problem Solving**: Uses the arts in coaching individuals to find new perspectives and strategies to solve difficult problems. This approach concentrates in the intensive and creative shaping required in the ‘Here and Now.’

3. **The Expressive Arts for Task Oriented Communities**: Uses the arts to strengthen the resilience of communities by increasing the range of play beyond the every day rigid work routines.
The Expressive Arts for Healing

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Some Principles of EA for Healing

Read more about this in The Creative Connection by Natalie Rogers, Ph.D., REAT

1. All people have an innate ability to be creative.
2. The creative process is healing.
3. Personal growth and increased awareness are achieved through self-understanding and insight.
4. The expressive arts lead us into the unconscious allowing us to discover new facets of ourselves.
5. Talking and writing about the new facets we discover allow us to integrate them and use them in our daily life.
6. As we journey inward for self-discovery, we also discover our connection to the world around us.

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The Expressive Arts for Healing

Eight aspects of the Expressive Arts that facilitate healing:

1. The healing power of Movement
2. The healing power of Visual Arts
3. The healing power of Sound and music
4. The healing power of Theater, Drama, Performance
5. The healing power of Sharing
6. The healing power of Writing
7. The healing power of Meditation and Receptivity
8. The healing power of the Group
The healing power of movement

Read more about this in The Creative Connection by Natalie Rogers, Ph.D., REAT

Movement is our primary medium of expression upon which all other means depend. Speaking, writing, singing, drawing, painting, using any tool or instrument, building, all begin with a movement that is then transformed.

As we begin to be aware of our way of moving in life, we also become conscious of how our emotional and physical well-being are connected. Movement can affect how we feel, and how we feel affects how we move.

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Movement as self-discovery

1. Regardless of how the movement begins, looking at our inner process is essential, you can start from: (1) A feeling you are experiencing such as joy, grief, anger, etc. (2) An image: “I am a tree in the wind” (3) A concept: “I will move as a powerful person” (4) A body impulse: “I will let my body move me”

2. Moving with a partner can give us hints about our one to one interactions in our lives.

3. Moving within a group can give us insights about our feelings and behavior in group situations.
Students were asked to move with eyes closed as if they were growing and collapsing, then make art and write about it, in that order. My text said:

“Growing was hard and painful but full of hope and inevitable for me. Even in the presence of other people making all sorts of sounds I kept on growing. My eyes filled with tears of joy at the strength of my drive to grow under any circumstances. I saw a rose blooming in the sun. I felt, with total clarity and strength, that my nature is to rise and develop regardless of the pain or joy of the world.”
The healing power of the visual arts

Through our intense focusing during the creative act, we actually transform the repressed feelings into constructive energy.
Self-discovery through visual art
Workshop facilitated by Lorena B. Fernandez MA

Art that comes from an image: These hands were created by a professional woman who wanted to “give more” to her family. She wanted to “bake bread” and do more things at home. She realized that there was a disconnect between what she wanted to do and what she was actually doing every day.
Writing about a back injury:

“Sometimes I have something that is so painful that I want to hide from it so that it will go away. Things in the dark become more terrifying, but if I decide to look at it, or make a sculpture about the pain, then, it becomes something of this world, and something that I can address… not knowing, not understanding, not wanting to see compounds my pain.”
Self-care through visual art

There are small things that bother us everyday. We know they are small and we wish we would not be bothered by such insignificant details, so we push those feelings down, aside and even forget the source of the feeling. Later on, we over eat or yell at the dog.

There is an alternative, if we are bothered by something, let us make a quick drawing and writing about it. That releases the emotion and honors our right to feel whatever we feel and it does not make us fat and it does not scare the dog.
Self-discovery through visual art
Workshop facilitated by Lorena B. Fernandez MA

This pre-teen son of a single mother had a younger sibling with a disability so he had to help as an “adult.” He made a representation of his life: “I put the past on black paper because I did not understand why things were as they were. I put the present and the future in light paper because now I understand. I put soccer today and in my future I want to be a pilot.”
Visual art and Communication

Using the visual arts to have a “conversation” on paper with a partner can offer insights about our communication style.

- Do we wait for a signal from our partner before we draw?
- Do we draw and do not check to see if we are being understood?
- Do we stay in our side of the paper or do we cross the other person’s boundary?
- Do we draw a line separating both sides or do we build together on one common drawing?
Visual arts in groups

Using the visual arts to create a group work can offer insights about our behavior within groups. How do we feel if someone draws on our space? Do we draw on other people’s drawings? Do we cover them completely? Do we create a boundary for ourselves? Do we feel we need to acknowledge everyone?

A woman said: “I drew my ugly little mushroom and when you came and drew a heart on it I thought: I am fine, there is nothing wrong with me.”

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Looking at art can inspire us to make art

Frida Kahlo
*Tree of Hope Keep Firm*

Seeing Kahlo’s art has encouraged many people to express their own feelings using the visual arts.

That is the power of art as inspiration!

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The healing power of music
Piano music by Paolo Knill PhD. at EGS

Making music and listening to music are aspects of using sound for healing. Our voice is a medium for communication but also a powerful medium for self expression and for self healing, using the voice as a means of integrating the mind, body and emotions. We can explore using our voice on our own, with a partner and in a group.

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The healing power of theater

We might have a story that has special meaning for us, acting it out by ourselves or with a group can help us bring it to life. Sometimes there are things that happened that we wish would have been different. We can try different endings to those situations.
The healing power of theater
Performance by Stephen K. Levine, Ph.D., REAT from EGS

These theatrical exercises are helpful to all involved since we all get to explore ourselves through the characters that we play, including the audience! Also, we can build a sense of community and increase our depth of understanding through rehearsal and performance.
Shadow mask workshop
Workshop facilitated by Lisa Maria Burkhard and Bonnie Slayton MA

In this workshop we created masks made of plaster and painted them to represent The Shadow Self: That part of ourselves that we rejected. This picture is from before painting the masks.

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Shadow mask workshop

At first we did not know what part of us would come out of our shadow, but as we played, pretended, made art, moved, wrote and shared it became clear for each of us.
What do you want to tell me shadow mask?

That you censor your dark emotions too much
You hide your sadness too much - You hide your anger too much. You need to let me come out!
I am anger - I am lust – I am joy - I am passion
I know that you hate drama, but you are suppressing your inner drama too much.
Your life is too sanitized.
- You are disgusted by raw passion. You are too civilized. - You are too proper.
NO!
Get Out Of That!!
You don’t need to follow and express a limited range of acceptable emotions in a proper civilized way.
You can be FREE.
FREE YOURSELF.
FREE YOUR ARTIST
The healing power of sharing

healing occurs to the degree in which the following three conditions are fulfilled

1. **Unconditional positive regard**: means that the client is free to explore all thoughts and feelings without danger of condemnation. The client is free to explore and to express without having to do anything to 'earn' positive regard.

2. **Empathic understanding**: means that the coach accurately understands the client's thoughts, feelings, and meanings from the client's own perspective. When the coach perceives what the world is like from the client's point of view, it demonstrates that the view has value, this empowers the client to continue *stepping forth with courage*.

3. **Congruence**: means that the coach is authentic and genuine. The coach does not present a facade, but is present and transparent to the client. The client does not have to speculate about what the coach is 'really like'.

This approach is called the Person-Centered Approach researched and developed by American Psychologist Carl Rogers PhD.

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The healing power of writing

To integrate the insights and the healing provided by the art it is important to write and talk about it. When we tell someone else about our meaning, the meaning becomes more clear to us. In doing that we can obtain further insights.

Writing about the art and the process of making it brings the meaning of the art and our process into full awareness. We are most aware about anything we put in words.

Some ways of writing about the art and art making process:

1. Writing about the art
2. Writing in the first person, as if you were the art
3. Free writing or write whatever comes to your mind
4. Dialoguing with the art
5. Storytelling about the art
After listening to drumming, I created this three dimensional structure with painted cardboard. Over black paper there are two circles that look like fertile worlds because of their green and blue color, they act as a base, then two cardboard ‘feet’ hold up a yellow circular shape above the two worlds. The black paper holding all this has gray and green circular paint strokes around the worlds.
I stand with one foot on each world. One world is the tame, peaceful world that I create for my small children so that they can feel safe and happy; the other world is the dangerous outside world, filled with suffering, and stress. I am of the two worlds, and......... they are almost identical! Maybe one is not so tame and the other not so dangerous!!
The healing power of free writing

Free writing is not only a way of finding out what one is thinking but also how, in what rhythms, words, phrases; it is a way for people to find and explore their mind.

Write for ten minutes. Do not stop writing. Do not worry about spelling, punctuation, complete sentences, grammar.

If you can’t think of something to say, write “I can’t think of something to say” over and over until you think of something.
Me: What do you want to tell me painting?

It: That on your horse you charge the world. That you are able and strong.

Me: But the mermaid seems helpless. She is not struggling at all. She seems comfortable in the snake’s tight grip. Paralyzed. What are you telling me with them?

It: One thing that paralyzes you is your commitment to your little kids. But their needs are changing, soon you will be able to fulfill their needs to your satisfaction and also use your skills in the world outside your home to your satisfaction.
The healing power of storytelling
Doll Workshop facilitated by Theresa Scovill MA

“Perfection is Now”
Driftwood sculpture

Once upon a time there was a woman made of driftwood. Although the pieces that formed her were found on a beach, each piece had been shaped by the loving care of the ocean tides and currents.

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The healing power of meditation

- Tuning into ourselves, sitting quietly, with eyes close, paying attention to our breath, before writing or making art, letting stillness be part of our creative process can be very powerful.

- Some people can have a hard time with meditation because they rather paint, dance, move, make sculptures or write, which to them has a grounding effect. Yet, they have reported having grown to cherish stillness thanks to their personal work with Expressive Arts. They used to be unable to be still, to wait in silence. Now they say they can be silent, enjoying and observing the world, nature, other people all day long without a problem.
The healing power of the group

- In Expressive Arts the group has the potential to be a powerful healing element for each participant, under the guidance of the facilitator.
- The facilitator suggests exercises and guidelines to create trust that will enable the group to become a safe and healing force for each of the participants.
- When conflict arises, the facilitator mediates within the group.
We are often able to accept and even cherish things about others that we reject about ourselves. We would not dare judge others as harsh as we judge ourselves. The group can hold our hand as we reveal something that we hate about ourselves.
The healing power of the group

ARTreach group workshop facilitated by Vickie McMillan and Lorena B. Fernandez MA

- I have said things in a group that were really awful to me and to my surprise nobody ran out screaming, it turns out that what I thought was a terrible secret was not particularly shocking. It had acquire disproportionate importance and power because it was kept in the dark.

- In that way the group can hold your hand as you free yourself from limiting beliefs and imaginary monsters.
Some useful group guidelines

ARTreach group workshop facilitated by Vickie McMillan and Lorena B. Fernandez MA

Read more about these guidelines in The Creative Connection by Natalie Rogers

- There is no right or wrong way of doing things.
- No experience with art media is necessary.
- The atmosphere is non-competitive.
- All feelings are allowed. Dreams, aspirations, revelations and insights are given respect and encouragement.
Talking about the art

How can we talk about the art created in an Expressive Arts workshop?

- We can ask the person to explain what the process was like and the meaning the art has for him or her.
- We can ask the person if he or she wants our impressions or input.
- Own our feelings and thoughts as personal reactions, rather than analyzing or interpreting the art. Example: “When I look at this picture I get a sense of anger” rather than “You must be really angry!”
Owning our projections

We project ourselves on all around us. We can begin practicing to own our projections. That means being aware that what we focus on is about us and not necessarily about the others. Sometimes it might overlap, but very often it does not.

Slowly and with enough Expressive Arts practice we can begin detangling our projections from the world around us. Slowly we learn to distinguish between our opinions and our observations. That will increase our personal freedom exponentially!
Owning our projections

If we learn to *own our projections*, then the opinions, comments and criticisms by others do not have to be taken personally because we have a clear understanding of where we end and the other person begins. In other words we permanently remove a chip off our shoulder and can become more objective.

As artists, we can choose to depict our *opinion* or our *observation* and we know the difference. That understanding gives us power as communicators.
The Expressive Arts for Problem-Solving

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What kind of problems can we solve with the expressive arts?

We can solve problems in which we experience a sense of being stuck in an unwanted situations for which we see no way out. There is a clear feeling of being trapped without any viable alternatives. This ‘tightness’ can also be described as ‘having no range of play.’ (For emotional problems see the section on healing.)

These types of problems are difficult to solve because the answer or solution is not within the range of alternatives that we can see. The more we focus on solving the problem, the less we can find a solution. Therefore we need to find a new perspective from which we can see new options. To find that new perspective we use a process developed by Paolo Knill PhD called “Decentering” which includes the Expressive Arts.
Decentering is an activity that allows us to leave a certain landscape of thought and emotion in which we are stuck with an irresolvable problem. According to Paolo Knill centering on the problematic situation has the tendency to produce “more of the same” possibly worsening the situation.

By engaging in the Expressive Arts we enter a different landscape in which we are able to become fully engaged, use our resources, (such as creativity and curiosity) be open and playful, as a result we achieve a satisfying outcome (the art) and a new state of mind (“I am able”, “relaxed confidence”, “good humor”, etc.)

From this new state of mind, we can look back at the problematic landscape from a new perspective. The new perspective allows us to see solutions that were hidden in our restricted old perspective.
Assumptions in using Expressive Arts decentering

This method is based upon the assumptions that:

1. As restricted as a situation might be, there exist other possibilities hidden to the persons in the situation.

2. Advances into the unknown are made more attractive by a coaching session marked by openness, appreciation, playfulness, lightness and curiosity.

3. The client is the ‘expert’ in her situation. The coach will only help the client explore in new ways to find a new perspective.

4. Problems that seem irresolvable require more than a linear step-by-step approach, instead they might require something ‘new’ or a more basic change that we can find by expanding our “range of play.”

More about this method in Principles and Practice of Expressive Arts Therapy by Paolo Knill PhD, Ellen G. Levine PhD and Stephen K. Levine PhD.
Realms in an Expressive Arts coaching session

1. Each meeting or session has three areas or realms:

2. The mediated realm: The things we plan, such as time, space, frequency, materials, instruction. The mediated can be analyzed and reproduced. It has a quantitative aspect.

3. The unmediated realm of the meeting: The things that spring forth, are expected, become visible, disappear, reappear or linger. Trust that comes and goes, insight, expected crisis. What happens here can be partly foreseen, but not reproduced, not reversed or fully controlled. It has quantitative aspects.

Expressive Arts for Problem-Solving

9 basic steps of a coaching session

1. Self check: let us be opened, curious, present.
2. Define the problem.
3. Define a desirable outcome for the coaching session.
4. The coach provides an artistic challenge to the client.
5. The client creates a satisfying result for the artistic challenge.
6. The client and the coach talk about the tangible, visible and surprising characteristics of the work that resulted. *(From here on the coach should take some notes about the client’s thoughts that can be read back to the client to trigger or recover useful ideas.)*
7. Client and coach talk about the process of making the work and any surprises that happened during that process.
8. Harvesting: Going back to think about the original problem the client answers: If the art-making had anything to do with the original problem, what would it be? What else?
9. Integration: What helpful thing do you take with you? What could be the next small step to take?
Theme near vs. Theme far

1. When deciding on the decentering task that you will suggest to your client, you might choose between a theme near decentering, in which the artwork or situation you propose is somewhat similar to the problem that the client wants to resolve. (Beware: Don’t choose something so close that it ends up producing more of the same stuck perspectives and feelings.)

2. You might instead choose a ‘theme far’ decentering, in which your suggested an artistic challenge or task that seems to have nothing to do with the problem in question. This second type of artistic challenge could be more useful because it might activate farther out unused inner resources in the client’s problem-solving inner tool box.
When we talk about the art, we strive to stay on the surface. That means that we carefully describe the physical appearance of the work, the sensual and aesthetic aspects of the work and we make an effort to stay away from interpretations and valuations. We do this because we are searching for ‘something different’ and interpretations and valuations are usually ‘more of the same.’

Some examples of questions that stay on the surface of the work are:

1. What does it look like?
2. What elements can you distinguish?
3. In looking at it, does something surprise you?
4. Where would you exhibit this work?
5. What would be a good title for this work?
6. If it could speak, what would it say?
Talking about the process

1. What allowed the work to evolve?
2. Were there obstacles to making this work?
3. What did you do to overcome the obstacles?
4. Are you satisfied with the work now at the end? What is most satisfying?
5. Thinking about the whole process, what was important to you?
6. What did you experience?
7. What changed for you?
8. Did something surprise you?
9. If all this process had been a performance piece, what would you call it?
In this stage we go back to looking at the original landscape or the original problem. The coach then asks the client if thinking back to the second landscape that included the art-making session, the discussions about the work and the discussion about the process, does the client find synchronicities or associative ideas between those two landscapes?

The coach will continue to ask for these synchronicities for as long as they come. If none come, the coach can ask to read out loud what was said about the art and about the process. Once they get three to ten associative ideas, the coach can ask:

1. Which of these points mentioned have a special interest to you? Tell me more about it.
2. If that were a really important connection what would that mean?
Integration

In this last stage the goal is to integrate the findings into everyday life.

The question is, given what we have found in this session, what would that mean for when you are in a similar situation again, or what would that mean for next week?

What do you take with you, from our session, that seems to be helpful for your situation?

What could be a next step, no matter how small, that you could take next?

What will you do as a follow up to our findings here?
Low skill / high sensitivity

This fundamental principle in Expressive Arts refers to the emphasis on sensitivity. We are not looking for developed artistic skills but for developed sensibility towards the specific situation, materials and persons involved in the artistic work. We increase sensitivity by:

1. Tuning into the sense with a physical warm up, sensory exercises and meditative attentiveness.

2. Exploring the unexpected possibilities and restrictions of the materials at hand.

3. Raise awareness about the dialogue between the emerging art work and the artist.
“Less is more” setting up constraints

The issue of setting up constraints is, in my opinion, the main differences between using expressive arts for healing and for problem-solving.

When using arts for healing, the client is resolving an issue from the past or expressing unwanted emotions. In both cases she is driven towards expressing something particular, perhaps very difficult to express, therefore placing external constraints might be discouraging. Instead the coach will want to ‘provide resources’ for the client to express what needs to be expressed, such as receptivity, openness, art materials, etc.

When the person is stuck with a difficult problem of the ‘here and now’ for which she is not strongly driven in a self expressive way, setting up constraints around the art making will help the client to mobilize inner resources (such as interest, creativity and playfulness) by providing “something to push against” in order to create the art work. These mobilized resources in turn will facilitate finding the new perspective from which to see new solutions for the problem.

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“Less is more” setting up constraints

Providing ‘constraints’ for the art making decentering session is helpful because it allows the individual to mobilize more or new parts of her creativity and inventiveness to achieve a satisfying result.

By placing constraints the coach is mimicking an important aspect of the ‘real life’ landscape of the ‘problem’ in which there are real constraints. Therefore, don’t be afraid to set up constraints and give clear and adequate direction about the artistic ‘challenge.’

Paolo Knill’s gives us some areas to think about where we might find some useful constraints, he has an acronym:

- **M** = Materials that are easy to manage
- **O** = Organize a direction of discovery that motivates
- **R** = Restrict the frame and the field of play
- **E** = Exploration: simple and clear direction for playful Exploration

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Two types of Decentering play or ritual oriented vs. art work oriented

1. We can use play or ritual to leave the problematic landscape for a new landscape in which to mobilize our creativity to find new perspectives. This practice may or may not have a direction outside the actual play or ritual. If it does not, afterwards we focus our discussion and harvesting around “the process.” If we develop a play or ritual that can be repeated, that becomes ‘the artwork’, or the second option.

2. A second option is to create an art work. The visual arts, poetry, story telling, dance, music, etc. strive for ‘a thing’. A song, act or dance might be repeated and re-shaped into a work, often followed by a sense of achievement and satisfaction of the performer. The performance might be intended for the presence of an audience. That might not be the case in if the work is a poem or a painting. Even when emerging through an improvisational structure the work can be recognized as ‘a thing.’

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Takes

A number of explorations towards a final work

Think about these questions

What do we gain from shaping and refining a performance until it is just as we want it? What is the reward of rehearsals in front of witnesses that give us feedback? And as witnesses, do we gain something from helping the performers improve the performance?

In my own experience as a poetry reader, what I gained was a sense of congruence between the words, the meaning behind the words, my emotions and the delivery of the words.

Is congruence something that we value? Are there social rules that interfere with our ‘congruence’? What is congruence good for? What do we gain by obtaining alignment between our inner truth, our outer expression and how we are perceived by others?
Takes
A number of explorations towards a final work

1. A first take may be a sensitizing and material exploration.
2. Second comes the client’s feedback about the experience and the facilitator’s feedback from witnessing.
3. Third is the feedback regarding what worked, what surprised and what was challenging.
4. Then talk about wishes for what could happen in the next take.
5. After another take we ask: Is it on the way? What does it need to get there? What could be left out or used again? Where are you with the work? Is it complete? How do you know? Where do you see its completion? What helped? What was in the way and how did you overcome it?
6. Finally, the question: shall we make any changes in the score for the next take or just try once more? Hear suggestions from all involved.

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Example of Takes
A number of explorations towards a final work

Bilingual poetry reading celebrating the genius of 17th century feminist poet and scholar Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz.
Readers - Diana X. Muñiz and Lorena B. Fernandez
Music - Randy Cordero - Flamenco Guitarist
MC – Julietta Ducotte, director of the Flamenco Poets Society

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Example of Takes
A number of explorations towards a final work

We practiced connecting with *the text* and *the audience*. First we explored what does the poem say to me? How do I feel about it? And then, we attempted to read while expressing our emotional connection to the text. We rehearsed (read the poems to each other and listened to the feedback) for six weeks until we felt that the text, our emotions, our expression and the perception by the others were all in alignment. The alignment of these four elements made the reading deeply satisfying to us because it felt ‘true’, ‘genuine’, ‘courageous’ and because the audience ‘connected.’
Example of Takes

A number of explorations towards a final work

Flamenco guitarist Randy Cordero, tailored the music to the emotional ‘atmosphere’ between poems. This ‘atmosphere’ varied between rehearsals and in the final show. Randy used his high sensitivity to make last second fine tunings about his performance that were deeply satisfying to us all because they felt ‘connected’, ‘coherent’ and ‘congruent.’
The client’s aesthetic responsibility

As coaches, we are interested in using an approach that increases the client’s sense of aesthetic responsibility to ‘unlock’ her shaping process and ability and its inherent transforming power. This approach will allow the client to draw on previously unrecognized resources.

The interventions or responses of the coach are always from the nature of the artwork itself, the coach responds to “what is there” through a feeling of true interest in the work and the client. The intervention should never spring from a desire to ‘prove’ a hypotheses, to try to satisfy a psycho-theoretical assumption or to satisfy the coaches aesthetic criteria.

In short, to be helpful in the responses given to the client’s process and the work, the coach or facilitator must know how to own her projections. This can be achieved by obtaining enough artistic and world experience, by reflection and study.

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Empowering coach-client interactions occur to the degree in which the following three conditions are fulfilled

1. **Unconditional positive regard:** means that the client is free to explore all thoughts and feelings without danger of condemnation. The client is free to explore and to express without having to do anything to 'earn' positive regard.

2. **Empathic understanding:** means that the coach accurately understands the client's thoughts, feelings, and meanings from the client's own perspective. When the coach perceives what the world is like from the client's point of view, it demonstrates that the view has value, this empowers the client to continue stepping forth with courage.

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The Expressive Arts for Task-Oriented Communities

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What are Task-oriented communities?

We define task oriented communities as companies and institutions in which members are working in different ways towards the achievement of a common goal. For example in a hospital the members are working towards improving the health of the patients, in a university the members are working towards educating the students and in a bank the members are working towards providing financial services to the public.

In task-oriented communities we can find diversity, connection, interdependence, and adaptation, which are the four characteristics that describe complex systems.

Task-oriented communities are nested; one community can contain another—for example a hospital community may contain a community of nurses, another of doctors, another of physical therapists, etc. Or they might organize themselves by the floor of the hospital on which they work, or other characteristics.
The objective of community art

The objective of providing community art is to strengthen the resilience of the community, to establish and retain its well-being and to increase the robustness of the complex system we call a ‘task-oriented community.’

In the context of communal art-making things happen differently than in the daily routine. People communicate with those they usually have little contact with. Someone without much influence in the daily routine may play a leading role in the art making. People will have opportunities to act, move and speak in ways that they not usually experience with each other.

This expands the ‘range of play’ of the community members, increasing the types and avenues for communication or connection, the variety of roles, learning, influence and behavior of the community members. This expanded range of play makes it easier for members to respond early to conflicts before they escalate.
Conflict in the workplace can be very destructive to good teamwork. In an environment of restricted communication, rigid thinking and stressful acting, differences between people can spiral into conflict, resulting in situations where cooperation breaks down and the team's mission is threatened.

The idea of widening the range of play by engaging imagination is a common concept in the practice of conflict resolution. In that practice conflicts are seen as situations that lack choices and that give participants a sense of being stuck in the issue of conflict.

Community art gives a community the opportunity to leave the area of conflict to a new landscape of new options for new actions, thoughts and emotions. We call this process Decentering. Decentering opens us up for the surprising clarity, the unpredictable solution, the unexpected perspective, provided by the artistic experience.
Decentering is an activity that allows the community to leave a certain landscape of thought and emotion in which it is stuck with an irresolvable problem. According to Paolo Knill centering on the problematic situation has the tendency to produce “more of the same” possibly worsening the situation.

By engaging in the Expressive Arts the community enters a different landscape in which it is able to become fully engaged, use its resources, (such as creativity, communication and curiosity) be open and playful, as a result it achieves a satisfying outcome (the art) and a new state of mind (“We are able”, “relaxed confidence”, “good humor”, a sense of empowerment, etc.)

From this new state of mind, the community can look back at the problematic landscape from a new perspective. The new perspective allows it to see solutions that were hidden in its restricted old perspective.
Assumptions of community art as decentering

This method is based upon the assumptions that:

1. As restricted as a situation might be, there exist other possibilities hidden to the persons in the situation.

2. Advances into the unknown are made more attractive by a community art experience marked by openness, appreciation, playfulness, lightness and curiosity.

3. The members of the task-oriented community are the ‘experts’ on their work situations. The facilitator will only help the community explore in new ways to find a new perspective.

4. Problems that seem irresolvable require more than a linear step-by-step approach, instead they might require something ‘new’ or a more basic change that we can find by expanding our “range of play.”

More about this method in Principles and Practice of Expressive Arts Therapy by Paolo Knill PhD, Ellen G. Levine PhD and Stephen K. Levine PhD.
Why is community art effective?

1. It is a rich exercise with repetitive experiences of accomplishment. With each repetition participants become increasingly excited. It is fun, motivating and empowering.

2. It is a concrete experience that allows emotional and cognitive reasoning and resonance. We are learning to create something together and we are enjoying.

3. The communal artwork can touch or move the community members. All the senses are engaged and therefore the art work makes sense because we are learning, enjoying AND experiencing the beauty of our creation. It inspires the community.

4. It is an experiential field of discovery that motivates curiosity. Discovery in this way is one of the fundamental sensory-motor and cognitive learning experiences. It is filled with moments of illumination and insight towards improving the common art work.
Why competitive games are less effective than community art

In competitive games there are rigid rules and a clearly defined outcome, therefore they are not an experience of collaboration towards creating something new as a community. Competitive games are less effective than community art in expanding the range of play because competitive games are not open ended.

Competitive games are less effective because they call into action the habitual competitive attitudes that could end up providing ‘more of the same’ competitive behaviors of the work place.

NOTE: an artwork that is already designed, from the top down, by an individual and that the community will just ‘fill in’ does not allow members of the community to express their creativity and influence, so it will be less effective than a participatory activity where each person can have a say and influence the process.
Daily complexity and community art

The complexity we face in everyday challenges calls for innovative solutions that consider the dynamic interdependence of place, material, structure, strategies, visions, emerging patterns and time. These everyday challenges are unique in their characteristics and the way to solve them is congruent with those unique characteristics.

The working style required to solve these complex everyday challenges is similar to the working style used to create community art: innovative solutions that consider the dynamic interdependence of place, material, structure, strategies, visions, emerging patterns and time.

That similarity in working styles is “the learning” that community art brings to teams in dealing with complex challenges, therefore increasing their robustness or resilience.
Complex challenges require innovative explorations

Community art bridges the unique complex challenges faced by a task oriented community in daily work and the unique complex artistic challenge. Both requiring innovative explorations.

Complex Work Challenges

Require innovative explorations

Community Art

Complex Artistic Challenges

Require innovative explorations
Innovative explorations require a playful attitude

Community art links innovative exploration with pleasure, which is the optimal state to come up with good answers for difficult challenges. A stressed mindset reduces our ability to see more options, while playfulness and fun lead to flow and increased creativity.

Complex Work Challenge
Could be stressful
Should be fun

Community Art
Innovative playful attitude

Complex Artistic Challenge
Could be stressful
Should be fun
Community art as a bridge towards new innovative and resourceful behaviors

Community art projects need space, time, materials and an initial vision or direction of forming. A key aspect should be that the initial vision will be constantly revised to include the surprising developments of the emerging product: *These emerging patterns are the innovation!*

The vigilance towards emerging patterns results in a process that finds an innovative and optimal response to the dynamic play between resources, the original vision, materials, and the feedback from all involved.
Realms of a community art experience

A community art experience has three areas or realms:

1. The mediated realm: The things we plan, such as time, space, frequency, materials, instruction. The mediated can be analyzed and reproduced. It has a quantitative aspect.

2. The unmediated realm of the meeting: The things that spring forth, are expected, become visible, disappear, reappear or linger. Trust that comes and goes, insight, expected crisis. What happens here can be partly foreseen, but not reproduced, not reversed or fully controlled. It has quantitative aspects.

7 basic steps of a community art experience

1. Self check: let us set our intention to be opened, curious, present.
2. Agree on what issues we would want to improve
3. Define a desirable outcome – a vision of us without these issues
4. Warm up, relaxing and sensitizing.
5. Concentrate and work intensely on a piece of community art that brings us away from our habitual reasoning and position to a place of shaping and attending to an emerging work of art, of which we do NOT KNOW the final form or outcome. All we know is that we will make it work to our satisfaction.
6. Once completed, we look at the work and see what we did to make it work, the tangible, visible and surprising characteristics of the work that resulted, how we did it and where and how we overcame obstacles and any surprises that happened during that process.
7. Harvesting: Going back to think about the original problem or issues, If the community art had anything to do with the problems, what would it be?
8. Integration: What could be the next step for us to take as a community?
Guiding the community art process 1

- Always guide in a manner in which you feel comfortable.
- Intervene or suggest without too much deliberation; rather, act with sensitivity, like an artist, in the moment. Be attentive to what emerges, probe when you see an option.
- Give a task that is challenging but manageable within a restricted frame, material and time, to increase comfort.
- Give Material that is easily manageable, simple shaping Organization, Restricted frame, give simple and clear directions for playful Exploration: MORE
- High sensitivity/low skill: flower arrangement, installation art, poetry slam, sound sculpture, washboard rhythms, etc. Start with what participants are familiar with and sensitize from there.
- In performing arts use ‘takes’ and stay with what begins to emerge.
Guiding the community art process 2

- The language should stay with in the tradition of the chosen discipline of art. In theater we talk about roles, props, backdrops, scenes, plots, etc.
- In the process of probing, give options to Explore, give permission to Experiment, stay in Simple language that is Specific and concrete. EESS
- The communal artwork results from the acts, ideas and explorations of the community. The facilitators’ tasks are to be alert and to observe attentively and in detail to give descriptive feedback as an aesthetic response.
- Staying in close contact with the participants and explicitly demonstrating what you verbally explain is helpful.
- Discussion should be avoided; rather try the suggestions. Art is done in the act, not in discussions.
The motivational forces are Curiosity and Functional Satisfaction. Curiosity needs a framed play-range in order to explore within it. Functional satisfaction requires a frame to repeat and get feedback about the ‘takes’ in the repetitive act connected to the mastery of an improvisation.

The leader must be enthusiastic, alert and extremely curious about ‘the emergent’ in order to guide communal art making. You, as the leader, create the atmosphere of hope for the success of the work.

The community art section of this presentation is based on Paolo Knills’ article Community Art: Communal art-making to build up a sense of coherence from POIESIS: A journal of the Arts and Communication, Volume 7, 2005, ISSN 1492-4986/2005 @2005 EGS Press. Printed in Canada.
Joining community art with music

- Be attentive to movement, gestures, architecture, choreography, light, shadow, etc. Stay on the surface of the things you perceive. Do not explain or guess at meanings. Remember silence is part of music.

- The music improvised is not there to lead or illustrate. It goes with the emergent; it nourishes, goes with or against; it is just another creation in the ensemble working together for one performance.

- A good way to start on an instrument is to use a pattern and allow it to develop, spin off or change, similarly to the way in which a dancer develops a step or movement pattern.

- The music may well be without a beat, a-metric, like a sound painting. This gives maximum freedom to the dancers. When using a beat, stay first with a simple beat. Give freedom for the ornamentation to the others. Remember that a beat is not mechanical; it is alive; it has a lag and a drive that keeps the dynamic.
The feedback culture

- The leader needs to model the feedback culture for the participants.
- Anchor what worked by describing it well and demonstrating it.
- Do not judge or focus on the things that failed.
- Speak from your own perspective: “I saw or heard…” stick to the material, structure or form.
- Try to formulate positively and from a position of aesthetic responsibility towards the emerging work.
- Do not make interpretations about what could be ‘behind’ what we observed. Stay on the surface.
- We make sure the one to whom it is addressed know exactly what we are talking about.
- We need to check if we are being understood before talking too long.

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Takes
A number of explorations towards a final work

Think about these questions

1. What do we gain as a community from shaping and refining a work until it is just as we want it?
2. What is the reward of rehearsals in front of other community members that give us feedback?
3. And as the feedback givers, do we gain something from helping the performers improve the performance?
4. Is congruence or “being on the same page” something that we value as a community?
5. What is “being on the same page” good for?
Takes
A number of explorations towards a final work

1. A first take may be a sensitizing and material exploration.
2. Second comes the communities feedback about the experience and the facilitator’s feedback from witnessing.
3. Third is the feedback regarding what worked, what surprised and what was challenging.
4. Then talk about wishes for what could happen in the next take.
5. After another take we ask: Is it on the way? What does it need to get there? What could be left out or used again? Where are you with the work? Is it complete? How do you know? Where do you see its completion? What helped? What was in the way and how did you overcome it?
6. Finally, the question: shall we make any changes in the score for the next take or just try once more? Hear suggestions from all involved.
How is the Work life of an Expressive Arts professional?

It can be a combination of the following activities:

1. Providing Expressive Arts to groups and individuals interested in personal growth, artists, writers, and other creative professionals.
2. Providing Expressive Arts to corporations and the business sector as team building, conflict resolution, brainstorming, diversity training, etc.
3. Providing Expressive Arts for groups in recovery.
4. Integrating EA with other types of counseling.
5. Providing Expressive Arts training in an academic setting.

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www.Lfcreative.com
Where can I get training in Expressive Arts?
International Expressive Arts Therapy Association - www.IEATA.org

**PhD in Expressive Arts**

**Accredited - United States**
Institute of Transpersonal Psychology
Lesley University

**Accredited - Europe**
European Graduate School

**Certificate Programs**
Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center

For more info visit the IEATA useful links

www.Lfcreative.com

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Suggested books about Expressive Arts

Books for learning about Expressive Arts:
1. The Creative Connection: Expressive Arts as Healing by Natalie Rogers

Books for Inspiration (bilingual English/Spanish):
1. Spiritual Healing With Art: Curación Espiritual Con Arte by Lorena Fernández
Expressive Arts Lecture
with Lorena B. Fernandez M.A.

To schedule a lecture about Expressive Arts for your organization and for more information visit www.Lfcreative.com

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Expressive Arts Coaching Session

With Lorena B. Fernandez M.A.

To schedule a coaching session with Expressive Arts for your organization and for more information visit www.Lfcreative.com

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About the Coach

Lorena B Fernandez M.A. is an artist, poet and Expressive Arts Coach. She strongly believes in the power of art to elucidate the human experience. She combines artistic and analytical techniques to help individuals and groups clarify their goals and express their potentials.

Lorena is a Ph.D. candidate in Expressive Arts at the European Graduate School EGS. She has a Certificate from Saybrook Graduate Institute and Research Center in Expressive Arts for Healing and Social Change. Her Master of Arts Thesis was on “The Sociological Content of the Paintings of Mexican Artist Frida Kahlo: The Plight of the Disabled, Feminism, Ethnicity and Political Ideology” She has a bachelor in Industrial Systems Engineering from Texas A&M University. For more information visit www.LFcreative.com
In closing I hope you feel inspired to include several modalities in your art making sessions, and that when you feel sad, anxious or need ideas to solve a problem you know you can count on the Expressive Arts. Remember that music can change your mood, as can dancing and singing. Acting out an emotion can transform that emotion into something new, and so can painting and writing. To feel good and increase your creativity consider making a daily Expressive Arts practice! A good sequence is:

1. Move (dance, go for a walk or play “pretend” games.)
2. Make Art (paint, sculpt, sing, write a poem, drum, collage, etc.)
3. Write about the experience or the art (gestalt, dialogue, story, etc.)
4. Share with non judgmental friends
5. Repeat