What are the Expressive Arts?
Open lecture by Lorena B. Fernandez
2010

A very short introduction to the Expressive Arts and how to use them to help ourselves

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What are the Expressive Arts?
International Expressive Arts Therapy Association - www.IEATA.org

According to the International Expressive Arts Therapy Association the Expressive Arts combine the visual arts, movement, drama, music, writing and other creative processes to foster deep personal growth and community development.
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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.
What are the Expressive Arts?

Picture from a collage workshop facilitated by Lorena B. Fernandez

Sharing the meaning of our artistic expressing in safety

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Who can use the Expressive Arts?

1. All of Us!! Every person can use the Expressive Arts for self-discovery and healing. We all have an innate capacity and a need to be creative.

2. For teambuilding, brainstorming, problem solving and more in a wide range of business, professional, and educational settings.

3. Programs servicing the elderly, children, refugees, veterans, individuals living with cancer and other health issues and persons who suffered abuse.

4. Expressive Arts can be a tool for peace and conflict resolution.
Some Principles of EA

Read more about this in The Creative Connection by Natalie Rogers

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

Seven 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 and Drama
5. The Healing Power of Writing
6. The Healing Power of Meditation and Receptivity
7. The Healing Power of the Group
The healing power of movement

In this picture EA facilitators Janet Rasmussen, Phyllis Clay, Silvia Jastram and Rosario Sammartino

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
Read more about this in The Creative Connection by Natalie Rogers

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.”

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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

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.
A student wrote 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 become something of this world, and something that I can understand or address… not knowing, not understanding, not wanting to see compounds the pain.”
Self-care through visual art
Workshop facilitated by Lorena B. Fernandez

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.

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Self-discovery through visual art
Workshop facilitated by Lorena B. Fernandez

This 14 year old son of a single mother had a younger sibling with a disability so he had to behave as an adult to help. Here 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 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?

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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 at EGS

Usually we think of our voices as a medium for communication or for singing and performing.
However, your voice can be used for self healing, using the voice as a means of integrating the mind, body, emotions and spirit.
Making music and listening to music are also aspects of using sound for healing.
The healing power of sound

Read more about this in The Creative Connection by Natalie Rogers

In this picture EA facilitators Rosario Sammartino, Phyllis Clay, Beatriz Parra & Lorena B. Fernandez

1. Sound explorations on our own
2. Sound explorations with a partner
3. Sound explorations with a group
Sometimes there are things that happened that we wish would have been different. We can try different endings to those situations with the help of the group.

We might have a story that has special meaning for us. The group can help us bring it to life.
These types of exercise are helpful to all in the group, since we all get to explore ourselves through the characters that we play, even the audience! 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

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.
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 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. Gestalt: Writing in the first person
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.

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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.
Dialoguing with the Art
Workshop facilitated by Lorena B. Fernandez

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.

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The healing power of storytelling
Doll Workshop facilitated by Theresa Scovill

“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 in to ourselves is a powerful method of opening to our creativity.

Try sitting quietly, with eyes close and paying attention to your breath, before writing or making art.

Allow stillness to become part of your creative process.
The healing power of meditation

- Some people can have a hard time with meditation because they rather paint, dance, move, make sculptures or write, which to them has a centering effect.
- 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.
The healing power of the group
ARTreach group workshop facilitated by Vickie McMillan and Lorena B. Fernandez

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

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

- 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.
- Individual dreams, aspirations, revelations and insights are given respect and encouragement.

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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 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 on our shoulder and can be a lot more objective.

As artist, we can choose to depict our opinion or our observation and we know the difference. That understanding gives us power as communicators.

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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.
Where can I get training in Expressive Arts?

International Expressive Arts Therapy Association - www.IEATA.org

PhD in Expressive Arts Therapy

Accredited - United States
Institute of Transpersonal Psychology
Lesley University

Accredited - Europe
European Graduate School

For more info visit the IEATA useful links

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Suggested books about Expressive Arts

Books for learning about Expressive Arts:
The Creative Connection: Expressive Arts as Healing by Natalie Rogers
Principles and practice of Expressive Arts Therapy – Towards a Therapeutic Aesthetics, by Paolo J. Knill, Ellen G. Levine and Stephen K. Levine

Books for Inspiration (bilingual):
Spiritual Healing With Art: Curación Espiritual Con Arte by Lorena Fernández
How To Exist, An Impractical Guide: Como Existir, Guía Impráctica by Lorena B. Fernandez

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Expressive Arts Coaching

Schedule a free 40 minutes trial coaching session with Lorena B. Fernandez M.A.

Regular 60 minute sessions are conducted at Shraddha Zone 1411 Avenue A, Katy, TX 77493.

To make an appointment and for more information visit www.Lfcreative.com
Lorena B Fernandez is an artist, poet and Expressive Arts Coach. She has kept an art journal since she was eleven years old. She strongly believes in the power of art to elucidate the human experience. 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. She has a Master of Arts in the Humanities with a Thesis 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 Engineering from Texas A&M University.
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, make a daily Expressive Arts practice!

A good sequence is:

1. Move (dance, go for a walk or pretend to be a tiger, etc.)
2. Make Art (Paint, sculpt, collage, etc.)
3. Write about the art (gestalt, dialogue, story, etc.)
4. Share with non judgmental friends
5. Repeat