

Lewis and Clark College
Graduate School of Education and Counseling
Summer 2011

CPSY 590:

Expressive Arts Therapy



“When I let go and can allow myself to imagine, I’m actually coming back to myself because they’re always projections...fantasy gives us an access to our own real experience.”

Violet Oaklander

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Office hours: Tuesday 2:00–4:00 p.m.

2 Semester Credits

South Campus Conference Center Room 115

Thursdays, 1:00-4:45 p.m. 5/12-6/30

Required Class Texts

- 1) Oaklander, V. (1988) *Windows to our Children*, Gestalt Journal Press, NY (0939266067)
- 2) Mortola, P. (2006) *Windowframes: Learning the art of Gestalt play therapy the Oaklander way*, GestaltPress, NJ (0881634638)

Course Description

The importance of mediating higher-level, conceptual work with more concrete referents has been well documented in the literature on development, education and psychology. Piaget called for “manipulatives” – for example, wooden blocks – in order to aid a child in literally grasping the more abstract concepts of addition, subtraction and number. Vygotsky noted the importance of “scaffolding” – building up to more abstract linguistic concepts by first ensuring the understanding of more fundamental ones. Werner developed the concept of “microgenesis” in order to describe the importance of physical and sensorial processes in more conceptual problem solving. Lakoff and Johnson also describe the way in which all higher-level conceptualization is related to the use of visual and tactile metaphors.

This class is designed for mental health practitioners interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the theory and practice of the use of the mediating properties found in the expressive arts in therapy and counseling as applied to clinical and school settings with children, adolescents, and adults. The International Expressive Arts Therapy Association (IEATA) defines the expressive arts in the following way:

The expressive arts emphasize an interdisciplinary or intermodal approach to creative endeavour. The field is grounded not in specific techniques or media but in how the arts can respond to the multitude of human experience from life challenging situations to self-realization. Expressive arts professionals, such as therapists, consultants/educators, and artists work with symbols, text, movement, sound, and other various media grounded in the body and imagination. Expressive arts practitioners are sensitive to individuals' needs during the creative process and are committed to fostering a compassionate environment for listening, speaking and witnessing.

In this course, we will be exploring the uses of drawing, clay, sand tray, puppets, musical instruments, and picture cards to understand their utility and application as “mediating tools” in the

counseling and therapeutic context as applied to individuals and groups of all ages. We will focus on the work of one particular author, Dr. Violet Oaklander, an early pioneer of expressive arts and Gestalt play therapy. Dr. Oaklander's 1978 text *Windows to our Children: A Gestalt Therapy Approach to Children and Adolescents* presented a model of working with children and adolescents in the therapeutic setting using the expressive arts that has since influenced practitioners worldwide. Presently, this text is published in eleven languages – English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Serbo-Croatian, Croatian, Russian, Chinese, Hebrew, Korean and German. *Windows to our Children* is a popular textbook used in counseling programs at universities and colleges around the world, including Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Brazil, Israel, Canada, the United States, and many countries in Europe. In exploring Dr. Oaklander's work, we will be focusing on accomplishing the following goals for the course:

- 1) understanding the developmental and psychological theory underlying the use of the expressive arts in counseling and therapeutic contexts.
- 2) gaining an understanding of and experience with multiple expressive media
- 3) developing a repertoire of approaches for the application of expressive arts in counseling and therapeutic contexts
- 4) determining which expressive media provide the best fit for you as practitioner and for the populations you work with

Course Requirements

Regular class attendance, completion of all class readings, and active participation in class discussions and exercises are expected and necessary to make this a rich and dynamic learning experience for all involved. Due to the brevity of our meeting time together, more than one absence from class over the term may result in a failing or incomplete grade. I will expect you to contact me prior to class sessions or due dates regarding any absences from class or problems with assignment deadlines. If you miss an entire class session (or more than two hours of a class session) I will expect a make-up writing assignment, due at the beginning of the next class period: A three page paper in which you compare and contrast two additional readings (journal articles or book chapters) on the activity of the week with the class readings for that week.

Each week, the class will be divided into four sections. Expectations for participation in each individual class session are described below as I outline the basic five-part structure that each class will contain:

Opening check-in

I will open each class session with a check-in that in some way utilizes the expressive arts. The function of each check-in is two-fold: First, to model such exercises that can be applied to therapeutic contexts with children, adolescents, and adults, and, second, to help us “arrive” as a group and be present for class time.

Expressive arts experience

In this portion of the class, I will facilitate a “hands on” experience with varying media. I will also usually demonstrate with an individual or small group how such media can be used therapeutically. Your active and willing participation with each experience and media is expected in order to increase your own knowledge, likes and dislikes of various expressive arts materials. Your participation as part of the demonstration with me in front of the group is voluntary and will not be counted as part of your grade.

Teamwork with media

After I have demonstrated how to work with the media with an individual or small group, it will be your turn to practice this work. We will break up into small groups of two or three in which you will take on the roles of client, therapist and observer. While you are in the role of the therapist, you will audiotape your work with the client. These audio-recorded practice sessions will provide you with data to be used in class assignments (described below).

Discussion: Practice and theory

During this period, you will be expected to draw upon your close readings of the course materials in order to contribute to the discussion by first sharing a passage from the reading that caught your interest and then sharing your reflections/questions/concerns sparked from that passage, especially in relation to the work in class that day. Such individual contributions will be noted as a way for me to gauge your overall participation in the class.

Course grading summary (300 points total)

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|---------------|---------------------|
| Attendance | 100 points possible |
| Participation | 100 points possible |
| Final Paper | 100 points possible |

“Practicing the Expressive Arts” Final Paper Overview

On the day of the final class, you will be expected to turn in a 5-7 page paper which will serve as a summary of your experiences and learnings in the class. In this section I describe both the big picture and the small details of this paper.

One of my main tasks as a professor is to help you better integrate your thoughts, feelings and actions regarding your personal learning and your professional practice. To me, clear writing plays a big part in accomplishing this goal. That is, good writing reflects a conscientious and sustained effort to make clear and visible your thoughts, feelings and experiences about a relevant topic and how you should act in your professional role as a consequence of these reflections. In this way, writing is an important “expressive art” and means of helpful communication that we will be focusing on in this course as well.

Clear writing is a result of a process, not a one-time venture. Your paper should therefore be proofread by a qualified second reader. In your final version, you should have a paragraph on the bottom of the last page describing who proofread previous versions, what changes were made, and what you learned in this process. Any paper that contains numerous errors in punctuation, spelling, grammar or clarity will be graded accordingly. The *Grading Guidelines* (below) detail the criteria by which your papers will be graded. Please attend to these carefully as you compose your paper.

“Practicing the Expressive Arts” Grading Guidelines

1. The paper contains a cover page that includes the title, course number, and author contact information (name, phone, and email).
2. The paper is printed, double-spaced, page-numbered, stapled (no covers), and turned in on time.
3. The paper contains effective use of spelling, punctuation, and grammar in communicating ideas, resulting in clear writing. Quotations of over 40 words are indented in block form.
4. The paper contains effective construction for meaning at all levels (sentence, paragraph and whole paper) with helpful and thorough transitions between each provided.
5. The paper contains each of the following sections and is outlined in the following way:

Introduction

Describe what you intend to do in this paper and why. The opening should be an overview of the ground you will cover in the paper and should be written last upon completion of the rest of your paper.

Body/Work Samples

The body of this paper should contain: 1) approximately three, transcribed work samples from your in-class practice (approximately a quarter of a page long each) that serve as examples of; 2) concepts and ideas from the readings in the form of direct quotations and clear references (cited in APA style). These connections between practice and theory are then reflected upon to make clear what you have learned or become aware of in this process. I will provide more specific examples in class. I include two examples below:

Example one: Show how you help (or did not help) the client better differentiate/ become aware of/bring into clear figure some aspect of their experience and then integrate/accept/make sense of that experience.

Example two: Show how your prompts help the client to “be it” better, immersing herself in the expressive arts experience before later emerging from and reflecting on how this experience might “fit” for her own life.

Summary and closing

The closing section should contain two things: 1) an overall summary of the paper and a review of the ground you have covered; 2) a set of overall reflections of what you learned both as a person and as a professional from the class, the experiences, the readings, and the discussions as well as what you will take with you from this class to apply to your professional role.

Proofreading paragraph

The proofreading paragraph should describe who read your paper (at least one other qualified person), what changes you made to your writing through the proofreading process, and what you learned from in the proofreading process overall.

“Practicing the Expressive Arts” Student Writing Sample

Central to Oaklander’s work is the theoretical notion of “contact”; the therapist making contact with the client, the client making contact with the self, and the client making contact with the environment. As Mortola (2006) describes:

Violet elaborates on the concept of contact in the following way: “Ideal contact is having all of yourself present in a situation: your senses, body, emotions, intellect.” Through making good contact, she says, we are able to use all these aspects of the self to meet the environment and get our needs met. (pg. 33)

Withdrawal is the counterpart to contact and the two do a continual dance. When there is contact the client presumably feels safe to be present and open. Conversely, contact may be broken when the client needs to withdraw in order to feel safe. The following work sample illustrates the process of both contact and withdrawal as I prompt my client to speak as if he were the three Medicine Cards he has chosen, representing the past, present, and future:

Me: “I would like to ask you to be the trout.” (the trout card represents the present)

Client: "I'm kind of cool, literally cool because I swim in the water. And I feel like I'm kind of cool around my fish friends." (pause)

Me: [Hm,mm] "So, being the trout you feel cool, you feel like you're flowing, like things move kind of smoothly. So how does that feel to be in that flow?"

Client: "I feel cool (laughs). I feel connected with other people, and like I have friends and being in the school of fish – I'm in school and I'm cool."

Me: "And you like that feeling of having others like you?"

Client: "Uh-huh. Cause this guy (picking up the deer that symbolizes the past) was really quite alone, he wasn't just shy but pretty alone. I don't really want to talk about him."

Me: "So since you went back and mentioned something about him (pointing to the deer card), can you just be the deer and tell me what it's like to be the deer?"

Client: "It's harder because that's middle school and I don't really want to talk about middle school...It's not a safe place and in fact I don't want to talk about it anymore."

Early in our work together, contact had been made between the therapist and the client, and, it could be said, between the client and some of his own experience. He seemed comfortable speaking as the trout and exploring the projections inherent in that symbol. However, that contact was broken and led to the client significantly withdrawing from the work when I pushed past his resistance to the deer card: he fidgeted in his chair and moved his body a little further away from me. The rest of our practice session didn't have the same quality. From this practice session and reviewing the material on tape, I learned about the fragile quality of contact and how quickly it can be broken. I also learned about my role in both helping to sustain contact, but also in how pushing forward to quickly in the work toward challenging topics can elicit contact being broken.



Expressive Arts 2011 Weekly Overview

| Meetings | Readings/Assignments | Activities/Media |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| 1 (5/12) Thursday 1:00-4:45 | Syllabus (in class reading) | Check in: scribble drawing Presentation: projection, art, & play Syllabus review Child drawing Presentation: Oaklander's work |
| 2 (5/19) Thursday 1:00-4:45 | Oaklander: Ch. 3 My working model Ch. 9 Therapy process | Check in: colors, lines, shapes Presentation: Contact, emotions, & relationship |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| | Mortola: Foreword and Introduction Ch 1 Building a relationship | Anger drawing Presentation: Therapy process |
| 3 (5/26) Thursday 1:00-4:45 | Oaklander: Ch. 1 Fantasy Ch. 2 Drawing Mortola: Ch. 2 Making contact (Safe place) Ch. 3 Self work | Card check-in Clay experience Video: Violet with an adolescent |
| 4 (6/2) Thursday 1:00-4:45 | Oaklander: Ch. 4 Making things (Clay) Ch. 5 Storytelling, poetry, puppets Ch. 6 Sensory experience Mortola: Ch. 4 Aggressive energy, anger Ch. 5 Music experience | Sand tray figures check-in Sand tray example Team work with sand tray |
| 5 (6/9) Thursday 1:00-4:45 | Oaklander: Ch. 7 Enactment Ch. 8 Play therapy (sand tray) Mortola: Ch. 6 Sand tray day Ch. 7 Stories, metaphors, puppets | Puppet check-in Puppet work Team work with puppets Video: Violet with young child |
| 6 (6/16) Thursday 1:00-4:45 | Oaklander: Ch. 10 Specific problem behaviors Mortola: Ch. 8 Practicum day Ch. 9 Self nurturing work | Card check in Demon Drawing |
| 7 (6/23) Thursday 1:00-4:45 | Oaklander: Ch. 11 Other considerations Ch. 12 A personal note Mortola: Ch. 10 Closing activities Ch. 11 Clay, culture, age | Card check in Rosebush drawing Presentation: Cross cultural aspects Paper excerpt sharing |
| 8 (6/30) Thursday 1:00-4:45 | <i>Practicing the Expressive Arts</i> Paper due | Music check in Group music experience Paper excerpt sharing Card closing activity Course evaluations |

THE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS WITH CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS

Violet Oaklander model

1. ESTABLISHING THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

I/Thou relationship
Boundaries/limits
Transference/counter transference
Children who cannot establish a relationship

2. CONTACT

Established and evaluated at every session

The fluidity of contact

Contact and energy

The role of resistance

Contact functions: Seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting

3. BUILDING SELF-SUPPORT

Experiences to promote awareness of self:

Strengthening the contact functions

Engaging the body and senses

Elements involved in strengthening the self:

Mastery

Making choices

Boundaries and limits

Power and control

Defining the self through self statements

Owning projections

Playfulness, imagination, humor

4. EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION

Contacting one's own "aggressive energy"

Provides self-support for expressing feelings

Assisting the child in expressing feelings

Talking about feelings

Talking about body states often described as feelings

Providing exercises to help the child experience feelings

Projecting feelings through drawings, stories, sand tray work, puppets, clay and other projective techniques

Owning and expressing feelings

Dealing with emotions related to past trauma

Learning skills for dealing with every-day feelings

5. SELF-NURTURING WORK

Helping children become self-accepting and actively nurturing to the self

ANGER & CHILDREN: Therapeutic Steps in the Oaklander Model

I. AWARENESS

A. Talking about Anger

1. What is it?
2. What are different kinds of angry feelings?
3. What makes you angry?
4. How do you know when you are angry?
5. How do you express it?

II. EXPRESSING AND CONTAINING ONE'S "AGGRESSIVE ENERGY"— Building self-support

Using games, drawings, clay, music, creative dramatics, puppets, stories and books, sand tray work, lists, body movement, statements, etc.

Essential Elements for "Aggressive Energy" Work

- a. In contact with therapist
- b. A safe container
Clear limits
- c. A spirit of play
- d. Exaggeration
- e. Content not necessary

III. ACKNOWLEDGING ONE'S OWN RAGE: "I'm angry!"

IV. ACCEPTING THE ANGER:

It's O.K. that I'm angry. There's no right or wrong to it.

V. CHOOSING HOW TO EXPRESS IT:

Learning new skills to cope with angry feelings

- A. Direct expression – saying what you need to say to the person you need to say it to.
- B. Private expression – anger energy must be expressed in some way to promote health and peacefulness.

VI. WORKING WITH UNFINISHED ANGER