

Lewis and Clark College
Graduate School of Education and Counseling
Summer 2015

CPSY 551

Introduction to Expressive Arts Therapy: A Gestalt-Based Approach Based on the work of Violet Oaklander



“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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1 Semester Credit

Tuesday 1:00PM - 4:00PM, York Graduate Center, Room 115

General Course Information

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

This class is designed for mental health practitioners interested in gaining an introductory 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 endeavor. 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.

In this course, we will be exploring the uses of drawing, clay, sand tray, 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) gaining an introductory understanding of the developmental and psychological theory underlying the use of the expressive arts in counseling and therapeutic contexts.
- 2) gaining an introductory understanding of and experience with multiple expressive arts media
- 3) developing an introductory 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 with whom you work

Assignments and Expectations

Reading discussions and reflective notes

You will be expected to draw upon your close readings of the course materials in order to contribute to the discussion by identifying and reading aloud a passage from each of the readings that caught your interest and then sharing your reflections/questions/concerns sparked from that passage. At the end of each class session, I will also ask you to reflect and write on a few prompts which I will collect.

Expressive arts experiences and teamwork practica

During the course, 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.

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 written assignments (described below in this syllabus). These triads are also an opportunity for you to demonstrate the following skills of therapeutic practice: Attentive and reflective listening; Verbal and nonverbal empathizing; Facilitated and engaged therapeutic experiences as modeled in class.

“Talking cards” and materials collection

Each student will be required to create their own collection of materials to be used in their own practice with children, adolescents or adults. This collection needs to include a stack of (optimally laminated) “talking cards” (to be described in class) but can also include an assortment of other materials (e.g. puppets, toys, games, art supplies, etc.) or a focus on a particular medium (e.g. Sand tray toys and table). During the last class session, students will be expected to briefly present and demonstrate their materials collection.

Attendance, Participation, and Professionalism (AP&P)

Regular class attendance, completion of all class readings and assignments, 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 a significant amount of any class period, I will expect a make-up writing assignment, due at the beginning of the next class period: A three page paper in which you describe what you learned from interviewing 3 class participants from the session you missed and also compare and contrast two additional readings (journal articles or book chapters) on the

activity of the week with the class readings for that week. In addition, I will be using the AP&P form below to evaluate each student in the course.

Linking practice and theory paper

For the class session, you are asked to write one 5-6 page paper which will serve to summarize 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* (on the following page) detail the criteria by which your paper will be graded. Please attend to these carefully as you compose your paper.

Course grading summary

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Readings discussions and reflective notes | 10 |
| Expressive arts experiences and teamwork practica | 20 |
| Talking cards and material collection | 10 |
| Attendance, Participation & Professionalism | 20 |
| Linking practice and theory paper | 40 |
| | 100 points total |

AP&P Form: Attendance, Participation & Professionalism Evaluation

The following criteria will be used by in this course to evaluate student efforts in attendance, participation and professionalism. Students are expected to be *present, on time, alert, and involved* in all activities and responsible, responsive and communicative in all relationships relating to the course (i.e. peers and professor). At the end of the course, the professor will be identifying both strengths as well as adding appropriate comments and goals that will facilitate further personal and professional development of the student.

Rating Scale: N—No Opportunity to observe/Not applicable
0—Does not meet criteria
1—Meets criteria minimally/Area for growth
2—Meets criteria appropriately
3—Meets criteria exceptionally/Area of strength

| | | | | | | |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | The student relates to peers, professors, supervisors, hosts and others in a respectful, ethical and appropriate manner. | N | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 2 | The student respects and values cultural, familial, and individual differences, including those involving age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status. | N | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3 | The student recognizes the boundaries of her/his competencies and the limitations of his/her expertise and takes responsibility for compensating for these limitations. | N | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | The student is thoughtfully and effectively engaged in all aspects of the program and makes the effort to contribute positively. | N | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5 | The student consistently shows strong and effective skills in verbal, nonverbal, and written communication. | N | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 6 | The student is consistently organized and manages time well. | N | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 7 | The student follows professionally recognized conflict resolution processes, seeking appropriate consultation, and is proactive in addressing individuals/groups involved. | N | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 8 | The student takes initiative, is dependable and responsible, and is concerned with his or her own personal and professional growth. | N | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 9 | The student demonstrates the ability to receive, integrate and utilize feedback from peers, teachers, supervisors and hosts and is able to give such feedback respectfully. | N | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 10 | The student exhibits appropriate levels of self-assurance and confidence, and balances this with a healthy sense of humility and openness to learning. | N | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 11 | The student demonstrates a continuing capacity for openness to points of view, theories, experiences and perspectives different than their own in relationship with peers and others in supervisory or instructional positions. | N | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 12 | The student considers the impact of her/his actions on the well being of others and the group (e.g., cohort, program, agency) as a whole. | N | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 13 | The student demonstrates ability to understand and apply ethical and legal requirements and professional standards in the overall program. | N | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 14 | The student demonstrates appropriate emotional self-regulation in interpersonal relationships with peers, supervisors, faculty, and others. | N | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 15 | The student demonstrates an ability to appropriately monitor the use of technology in personal and professional contexts. | N | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |

Comments on student’s strengths and at least one suggested goal for growth:

Linking Practice and Theory Paper - Grading Guidelines

1. Author uses clear and effective use of spelling, punctuation, and grammar in communicating ideas. Paper is typed. Spacing between lines is 1.5. Paper is 5-6 pages long, printed double-sided, or submitted via email by the deadline as a Word attachment. (5 points)

2. Author uses clear and effective construction for meaning at all levels (sentence, paragraph and whole paper) with helpful transitions between each provided. (5 points)

3. All sections of the paper described below are present and well-articulated (within and between):

a. Opening

Include paper title along with your name. Describe what you intend to do in the paper and why. Please staple your paper. No covers or folders please. (3 points)

b. Body

1. Provide written context and include one or more transcripts (approximately a page total in length) from practice session audio recordings. (5 points)

2. Provide substantial quotations or references from a) the class texts, and b) class presentations and discussions that helps you describe from a theoretical perspective what occurred. Indent quotes of 40 words or more. (5 points)

3. Make explicit linkages to the practice (transcripts) and theory (quotes/references) and elaborate on how the transcript from your practice and the quotations from theory are both similar and different. (5 points)

c. Closing

Summarize what you have covered in this paper. Describe what you have learned as a person and as a professional. Set goals for yourself regarding your strengths and your “growing edges.” (5 points)

d. Proofreading paragraph

Describe the qualified individual who proofread your work and what you learned in the proofreading process. (5 points)

e. References

Use APA format for all within text citations. You do not need to include a separate reference page if you cite only course texts. (2 points)



Expressive Arts Weekly Overview

| | Readings/Assignments | Activities/Media |
|---------------|---|---|
| Wk. 1 6/23 | Syllabus Due: End of class reflective notes | Card work: “A card for class...” “A card that was interesting to me...” Presentations and discussion: • Oaklander and her work • Organismic Self Regulation and Projection Video: BAM! Group closing |
| Wk. 2 6/30 | Oaklander: Ch. 1 Fantasy Ch. 2 Drawing Mortola: Foreword & Introduction Ch. 1 Building a relationship Ch. 2 Making contact Due: End of class reflective notes | Drawing work: “Scribble drawing” “Rose bush drawing” Presentation and discussion: Contact and Oaklander Approach Video: Violet & Blake (pt. 1) |
| Wk. 3 7/7 | Oaklander: Ch. 4 Making things Ch. 3 My working model Ch. 9 Therapy process Mortola: Ch. 3 Self work Ch. 4 Aggressive energy, anger Due: End of class reflective notes | Clay work: “Experiencing the clay” “Making something” Presentation and discussion: Aggressive energy and anger Video: Violet & Blake (pt. 2) |
| Wk. 4 7/14 | Oaklander: Ch. 6 Sensory experience Ch. 8 Play therapy Mortola: Ch. 5 Music experience Ch. 6 Sand tray day Due: End of class reflective notes | Sand tray work: “Figurine check in” “Making a scene in the sand” Presentation and discussion: The therapeutic process Video: Violet & Blake (pt. 3) |
| Wk. 5 7/21 | Mortola: Ch. 11 Clay, culture, age Due: Final Paper Due: Materials Collection | Final drawing Presentation and discussion: Cross cultural applications Course review and evaluation |

THE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS WITH CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS: The Oaklander model

1. ESTABLISHING THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

I/Thou relationship; Boundaries/limits
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 strengthen the self & promote awareness of self:
Strengthening the contact functions; Engaging the body and senses;
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"
Providing self-support for expressing feelings
Providing exercises to help the child experience, express and "own" feelings
Talking about body states often described as feelings
Projecting feelings through drawings, stories, sand tray work, puppets, clay, etc.
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

AGGRESSIVE ENERGY, ANGER & CHILDREN: Therapeutic Steps in the Oaklander Model

- I. AWARENESS: Talking about aggressive energy and anger
 1. What are they and how are they different?
 2. What are different kinds of angry feelings?
 3. What makes you angry? & How do you know when you are angry?
 4. How do you express it?

- II. EXPRESSING AND CONTAINING ONE'S "AGGRESSIVE ENERGY"
Building self-support (Using projective exercises)
Essential Elements for "Aggressive Energy" Work
 - a. In contact with therapist
 - b. A safe container with 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.

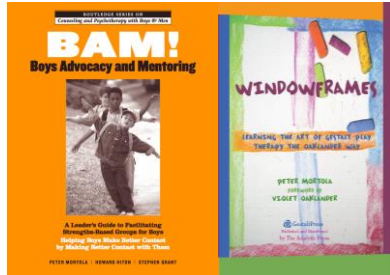
- V. CHOOSING HOW TO EXPRESS IT:
Learning new skills to cope with angry feelings
 - A. Direct expression – saying what you need to say to the person you need to say it to.

- B. Private expression – anger energy must be expressed in some way to promote health and peacefulness.

VI. WORKING WITH UNFINISHED ANGER

Play as Possibility: Exploration at the Edge

Peter Mortola, PhD, Lewis and Clark Graduate School of Education and Counseling, pmortola@lclark.edu



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

Violet Oaklander, (1978) *Windows to our children*, Real People Press, Salt Lake City

“It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living. Contrasted with this is a relationship to external reality which is one of compliance...something to be fitted in with or demanding adaptation.”

D.W. Winnicott, (1971), *Playing and Reality*, Routledge, London,

"Plato...sees the model of true playfulness in the need of all young creatures, animal and human, to leap. To truly leap, you must learn how to use the ground as a springboard, and how to land resiliently and safely. It means to test the leeway allowed by given limits; to outdo but not escape gravity."

Erik Erikson, (1977) “Toys and reasons: Stages in the ritualization of experience”, WW Norton & Co. NY

“...the question is why [the brain] must...continue to fabulate its way through nighttime dreams and daytime fantasies. The answer...is that if the brain didn’t keep itself labile, it might rigidify in terms of its prior specific adaptive successes.”

Sutton-Smith (1997) *The Ambiguity of Play*, pg 60, Harvard University Press

“Play is, as it were, a halfway house between the night and the day, the brain and the world...the normal presence of dream and play is associated with general mental health and their interruption is associated with dysfunction.”

Sutton-Smith (2001) *The Ambiguity of Play*, pg 62

“It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self.”

D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*

“The preferred state for survival would be through a ‘positive’ feeling... the state of joy as defining a greater ease to act...we may see play as children’s willful belief that they can act out their capacity for the future”

Lester and Maudsley (2007) *Play naturally: A review of children’s natural play*, Play England/NCB

“The evolutionary significance of play is not that it maintains an already existing reality, but that it provides alternatives to it.”

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Some paradoxes in the definition of play*, 1979

“...wherever playfulness prevails, there is always a surprising element, surpassing mere repetition or habituation.”

Erik Erikson, (1977) “Toys and reasons: Stages in the ritualization of experience.” WW Norton & Co. NY

“Play is the answer to the question: how does anything new come about?”

Jean Piaget, (1950) *The psychology of intelligence*.

“Play continually creates demands on the child to act against immediate impulse. At every step the child is faced with a conflict between the rules of the game and what he would do if he could suddenly act spontaneously... A child’s greatest self-control occurs in play.”

Lev Vygotsky, (1933) Play and its role in the development of the child

“The mystique of rock climbing is climbing; you get to the top of a rock glad it’s over but really wish it would go on forever. The justification of climbing is climbing, like the justification of poetry is writing; you don’t conquer anything except things in yourself...”

“To fill free time with activities that require concentration, that increase skills, that lead to a development of the self, is not the same as killing time by watching.”

“To fill free time with activities that require concentration, that increase skills, that lead to a development of the self, is not the same as killing time by watching.”

Mihaly Csikszentmihlyi (1990) Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience

“All real living is meeting.”

Martin Buber

“It is at the edge of anything—system or medium—that the most interesting events take place”

“Transactions at boundaries are a great part of trade & energy changes in life and nature...Go-betweeners or traders, like many plants and animals, are creatures of the edge”

“It follows that edges, boundaries, and interfaces have rich pickings, from trade both ways or from constant accumulations...”

Bill Mollison (1990) Permaculture: A practical guide for a sustainable future, Island Press, Washington, DC

“There was a green lane amongst semi-detached houses that led – physically and metaphorically – from suburban orderliness to wild playfulness ...a ‘border’ between...that became a favourite place for playing out.”

Lester and Maudsley (2007) Play naturally: A review of children’s natural play, Play England/NBC

“In a circus, the animals symbolize the possibility of danger, the clowns symbolize the disruption of conventions, while the acrobats symbolize the disruption of physical safety. Yet all of this takes place in a circus tent, where it is known that nothing really dangerous or disruptive will happen.”

Sutton-Smith, B. (2002) ‘Recapitulation Redressed’

"All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand, either materially or ideally...The arena, the card table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court...are all in form and function, playgrounds...isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain.”

Erik Erikson, “Toys and reasons: Stages in the ritualization of experience”

WW Norton & Co. NY 1977

"The playing child inhabits an area that cannot be easily left, nor can it easily admit intrusions. This area of playing is not inner psychic reality. It is outside the individual, but it is not the external world."

D.W. Winnicott, (1971) “Playing and reality”, Routledge, London

“When we see a child playing with a flower, or in the dirt, or skipping or playing tag, we should remind ourselves that what we are looking at is the child-like result of a deep and irresistible urge to interact with and have knowledge of the world and everything in it.”

Bob Hughes, (2013) Evolutionary playwork (2nd ed), Routledge, NY

“In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it.”

Simon Nicholson, (1972) “The theory of loose parts”, Open University

“Children come to see toys as vehicles of social acceptance rather than launching pads for imagination and fantasy.”

David Elkind (2007) The power of play: Learning what comes naturally, Da Capo lifelong, NY

“Playing naturally is not simply contained in a precious sense of caring for the environment, but as a real and immediate experience of playing uninhibitedly among the diversity and potential that such spaces afford.”

Lester and Maudsley (2007) Play naturally: A review of children’s natural play, Play England/NBC

“I work to build the child’s sense of self, to strengthen the contact functions, and to renew her own contact with her senses, body, feelings and intellect”

Violet Oaklander, (1978) *Windows to our children*, Real People Press, Salt Lake City

“Full humanity requires the ability to sense and be sensed in turn... We need to find our way in a tactile world again. We need to return from head to foot, from brain to fingertip, from iCloud to earth.”

Richard Kearney, (August 30, 2014), “Losing our touch” NYTimes,