

Lewis and Clark College
Graduate School of Education and Counseling
Fall 2013

CPSY 551

Introduction to 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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1 Semester Credit

Room and Time: York 107, 9:45-12:45 Monday

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) (Loaned to you in class)

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 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.

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

Attendance and make-up work

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 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 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.

Discussions of readings and theory

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. Such individual contributions will be noted as a way for me to gauge your overall participation in the class. I will also be using some of this time to present on further aspects of the work and theory that underlies it.

Expressive arts experience

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.

Teamwork practica 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 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.

Transcript review

You will be expected each week to listen to the recording made during the practica experiences described above. Specifically, you will need to listen to both the recording of you in the client role, as well as you in the therapist role. During the term, you may have the opportunity to present a piece of that recording that you have

transcribed to the class for discussion. The discussion that follows your presentation may aid you in constructing your final paper for the class.

Linking practice and Theory paper

During the class, you will write one 6-7 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* (below) detail the criteria by which your paper will be graded. Please attend to these carefully as you compose your paper.

Material collection presentation

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) “picture 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 session of the course, students will be expected to briefly present and demonstrate their materials collection.

Course grading summary

Attendance and make-up work	10
Discussions of readings and theory	15
Teamwork practica with media	20
Linking practice and theory paper	50
<u>Material collection presentation</u>	<u>5</u>
	100 points total

Linking Practice and Theory Paper: Scoring 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 6-7 pages long. (4 points)

2. Author uses clear and effective construction for meaning at all levels (sentence, paragraph and whole paper) with helpful transitions between each provided. (4 points)

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

a. Cover page

Include project number and title along with your contact information. Please staple your paper. No covers or folders please. (1 point)

b. Opening

Describe what do you intend to do in the paper and why. (3 points)

c. Body

1. Provide written context and include a transcription (approximately a page in length) from practice session audio recordings. (6 points)

2. Link this example from your work to a substantial quotation from the class texts (or class discussions) that helps you define, describe, or make sense of the transcript. Indent quotes of 40 words or more. (6 points)

3. Elaborate on how the transcript from your practice and the quotation from the text are both similar and different. (6 points)

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.

d. 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.” (3 points)

e. Proofreading paragraph

Describe the qualified individual who proofread your work and what you learned in the proofreading process. (1 point)

f. 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. (1 point)

Linking Practice and Theory Paper: 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 too quickly in the work toward challenging topics can elicit contact being broken.



Expressive Arts Weekly Overview

	Readings/Assignments	Activities/Media
Wk. 1 9/30	Mortola: Foreword Introduction (in class reading) Syllabus	Card work: “A card for class...” “A card that was interesting to me...” Presentation and discussion: Oaklander, projection, art, & play. Video: BAM! Group closing
Wk. 2 10/7	Mortola: Ch. 1 Building a relationship Ch. 2 Making contact Ch. 3 Self work Ch. 4 Aggressive energy, anger	Drawing work: “Scribble drawing” “Rose bush drawing” Presentation and discussion: Contact, emotions, relationship Video: Violet & Blake (pt. 1)
Wk. 3 10/14	Oaklander: Ch. 1 Fantasy Ch. 2 Drawing Ch. 4 Making things Ch. 3 My working model Ch. 9 Therapy process	Clay work: “Experiencing the clay” “Making something” Presentation and discussion: Aggressive energy and anger Video: Violet & Blake (pt. 2)
Wk. 4 10/21	Oaklander: Ch. 6 Sensory experience Ch. 8 Play therapy Mortola: Ch. 5 Music experience Ch. 6 Sand tray day	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 10/28	Final Paper Due Materials Collection Presentations	Final drawing Course review Course evaluations

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