

Izabella Klein, with Sandor Klein

Introducing intermodal expressive arts therapy in Hungary - a father's and a daughter's journey from humanistic psychology to art and back

Summary

Since our imagination builds on all of our senses, expressive arts therapy integrates all five art disciplines, music, visual art, dance, drama and poetry to sharpen our senses, increase our sensitivity and to tap into our embodied consciousness. The creative process of expressive arts therapy is non-interpretive and uses a low skill high sensitivity approach. Its philosophy is influenced by postmodern views among others and its practice and language is rooted in the arts, rather than in psychology. Having said that, humanistic psychology and within it the person-centered approach created by Carl Rogers rhymes to its processes and values. We find it amusing, that the same way as Carl's daughter, Nathalie extended his father's "talking therapy" into expressive arts therapy, we - as father and daughter - tend to do the same, on our own way.

Description and Discussion

I, Izabella, moved back to Budapest, Hungary in May 2010 and started working with expressive arts therapy and began to find the place of this new discipline and my own in the palette of therapies offered in Hungary.

Expressive arts therapy (EXA) was created in 1974 at Lesley College, Massachusetts, USA on the premises that not only experts can do art and making art in itself has curative effects.

There are many different forms of art therapies used in Hungary in high standard. Why do we need one more? What distinguishes EXA from other forms of art therapies?

EXA is intermodal, meaning it moves from one sensory modality to another. Art therapies are usually based on a single art discipline and employ mostly one sensory modality – like visual art works with what we can see, music is mostly an auditory experience. Since according to the archtypal psychologist and author James Hillman whose work continues influencing the theory and practice of expressive arts therapy, the quality of one's life can't be separated from the quality of one's imagination. This is a goal of EXA, developing the imagination of clients (1). Imagination is intermodal: just think about a dream or a daydream, there can appear the movement of running or swimming, the sound of a cry, someone's words, the picture of a forest - our imagination uses all the sensory modalities (2). So does EXA. It uses all 5 art disciplines – poetry/words, music, dance/movement, visual arts, drama - in an integrated way. What can be gained from this approach? No one single art form can crystallize (give it appropriate shape and form) every psychic event (3). This metaphor is used in crystallization theory to describe how in an environment „saturated” with artistic imagination, one more creative act will start growing and gains clarity and order out of chaos, like a crystal (4). Experiences can be enhanced, sharpened, focused, selected, clarified while transformed from one art discipline to the other within one session (intermodal transfer) (5,6). Also, clients can stay in the „alternative space”

(as not in ordinary reality) devoted to change longer which gives them more possibilities to surprise, empowerment, aesthetic solution and increased play range (7) and with it to work out an alternative narrative that's different from the old, ineffective one. Clients have different experiences and resistances with the different art disciplines so in this way clients who otherwise wouldn't be involved in creative therapies can be included into the process (3).

EXA uses aesthetic analysis (the process of phenomenological dialogue with the art) rather than psychological interpretation, it believes that the expert of the art piece is the artist itself. The therapist or the „change agent” as she is often called facilitates the process of the client's self discovery through art making without assigning meaning from an outside point of view (8). It uses a low skill/high sensitivity approach, that focuses equally on the product and the play or the artistic process. It is based on the aesthetic experience, the language of the art studio with the emphasis on increasing our sensitivity and using our senses and our embodied consciousness.

This approach of EXA is used and thought in different parts of the world like in the institutes of the USA (within it e.g. San Diego (<http://www.arts4change.com/>)), Switzerland (<http://www.egs.edu/>, <http://expressivearts.egs.edu/>), Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Canada, Peru. These schools are the members of the International Expressive Arts Therapy Training Network. IAETA (International Expressive Arts Therapy Association) is the international professional organization of EXA, which oversees education, training, registration and holds conferences worldwide.

To my knowledge besides my work the one other representation of EXA in Hungary is IKT (Center for Integral Dance and Expression Therapy) (<http://www.tancterapia.com/>), employing a similar approach to the one described above, but with different emphasis on psychology rather than on studio art making.

Since this is a more subjective account

I grew up in a humanistic family and was exposed to humanistic psychology and the person centered approach (PCA) at an early age. (Even at that time I could say „I would like to share my feelings with you” in 3 languages.) Through my parents' interest and my own curiosity I attended workshops of Carl Rogers in the 1980s both in Hungary and abroad as a teenager. After a break of 15 years spent in medical genetics as an MD, I returned to a closer relationship with people as an expressive arts therapist. I studied in the Expressive Arts Institute of San Diego, facilitated EXA sessions in crisis homes in Hungary, in the I. Department of Pediatrics and in the Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy of the Semmelweis Medical School, Budapest, and at the Kheiron Center for Transpersonal Psychology (<http://kheironkozpont.hu/>) in individual and group settings.

Besides main differences such as expressive arts therapy is rooted in the arts and the person centered approach is a school of psychology, they share some of their core hypotheses:



individuals have within themselves vast resources for self understanding and for altering their self-concepts, basic attitudes and self-directed behaviour. These resources can be tapped if a definable climate of facilitative attitudes can be provided by the therapist, such as to be

- genuine (real, congruent): putting up no professional facade;
- accepting (caring, prizing): letting the client to be, regardless of his/her immediate feeling;
- empathic: sensing accurately the feelings that the client is experiencing and validating it (9).

We find it deeply satisfying that our ways of working,- mine as an EXA therapist and Sandor's as a psychologist working with the PCA - meet on the grounds of the same values.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to my teacher Dr. Judith Greer Essex, director of the Expressive Arts Institute of San Diego, who guided me into a whole new world.

References

1. Paolo J. Knill, Ellen G. Levine, Stephen K. Levine
Principles and Practices of Expressive arts Therapy (change agent) 77. Hillman 56.
Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, UK, p 56, 77
2. Paolo J. Knill, Helen Nienhaus Barba, Margo N. Fuchs
Minstrels of Soul (imagination is interdisciplinary) 25. (intermodal transfer) 36.
EGS Press, Toronto, Canada, 2003 pp 25, 26
3. Ellen Levine
Tending the fire
EGS Press, Toronto, Canada, 2003 p 74
4. Same as 1. p 123
5. Same as 2. p 36
6. Same as 1. p 125
7. Same as 1. p 151
8. Same as 1. p 77, 96
9. Carl R. Rogers
A way of being
Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York 1980, 1995 pp115, 116

Written for the 2nd World Congress of Arts Therapies, Budapest, Hungary, 2011