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SOUNDINGS



Public Practice Art Therapy: Enabling Spaces Across North America (La pratique publique de l'art-thérapie : des espaces habilitants partout en Amérique du Nord)

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ABSTRACT

There is an open call in North America and abroad to develop third spaces (Watkins & Shulman, 2008; Timm-Bottos 2006, 2012, 2016), where neighborhoods and institutions provide places for people to connect, strengthen their voices, renew their love of each other, and develop their own community solutions with the support of university research. Public Practice Art Therapy can address the problems that we are collectively confronting by enabling small and sustainable third spaces across North America.

RÉSUMÉ

Un appel a été lancé en Amérique du Nord et à l'étranger pour la création de tiers-lieux (Watkins & Shulman, 2008; Timm-Bottos 2006, 2012, 2016), où des quartiers et des institutions donnent aux gens un lieu où ils peuvent établir des liens entre eux, se faire entendre davantage, renouveler leur amour l'un pour l'autre et trouver leurs propres solutions communautaires en s'appuyant sur la recherche universitaire. Cette pratique publique de l'art-thérapie peut contribuer à résoudre les problèmes auxquels nous sommes confrontés collectivement en établissant des tiers-lieux durables et à petite échelle partout en Amérique du Nord.

We live in troubling times when psychological symptoms are no longer confined to individual pathologies and are increasingly expressed as cultural norms. Poignant examples include the daunting legacy of missing and murdered indigenous women (“Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls,” n.d.; “The National Inquiry on Murders and Disappearances of Indigenous Women and Girls,” n.d.), the sudden rise of indigenous youth suicides (Ansloos, 2017; “Indigenous Suicide Prevention,” n.d.), the opioid crisis (Ubelacker, 2017), white supremacists flaunting racism in the streets (Dangerfield, 2017), and an inexplicable love of guns, contributing to the third leading cause of death of American children (Fowler, Dahlberg, Haileyesus, Gutierrez, & Bacon, 2017). Each of these collective “breakdowns” found within a North American context require adaptations of art therapy’s methodologies and delivery models.

Accompanying these cultural trends, it is no wonder that the earth also has her own quaking, feverish symptoms, regularly disrupting the status quo with

wind, fire, and rain. In my Montreal neighborhood, we recently experienced a microburst of more than 110 kilometers/hour winds that blew through our park, uprooting and dismembering beloved mature growth trees (*CBC News*, August 22, 2017). Far more serious issues abound: from over a million hectares of forest fires in British Columbia, Canada and the Northwest United States, to historic flooding in Houston, Texas, where homes were destroyed and thousands of people displaced. Science has attributed unregulated human activity—such as excessive mineral extraction, overdependence on carbon fuels, the destruction of forests and ocean coasts—as contributing to climate change that is now affecting every country on Earth. And yet, isolated North American corporations and their political leaders continue to deny the change, preferring to blindly contribute to a global crisis.

More and more people are beginning to see what the modern indigenous water protectors (Elbein, 2017) and indigenous peoples across the globe have

always known, that the planet itself and all the sentient and “inanimate” (i.e. rocks, stars, ocean) life forms living on it are interconnected and subject to suffering. Heightened concerns for these collective cultural–environmental symptoms test our profession’s relevance, ethics, and skills. As Hillman (1992) stated, “We cannot inoculate the individual’s soul nor isolate it against the illness in the soul of the world” (p. 99). He and others (Watkins & Shulman, 2008) have called for the revision of psychology with an expanded vision that has the capacity to respond to the mess we find ourselves in. Concordia University’s Art Hives Initiative in Montreal, Quebec, is one example of answering this call, working toward establishing a flexible and responsive art therapy path we are naming “*Public Practice Art Therapy*.”

Art therapists as conveners of third spaces

When the Art Hive project was initiated in 2011 with the start of La Ruche d’Art: Community Studio and Science Shop in St-Henri, innovation funding from the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation provided the opportunity to scale this project across Canada. We had hoped for a cascading effect and indeed, community art studios have popped up, doubling in numbers in the past year; from 57 Art Hives to 114, with the greatest increase happening in Quebec (50 Art Hives). While not limited to art therapy leadership, 30 art therapists and art therapy students are currently

leading 20 Art Hives across the province. (Figure 1).

Before the first Montreal Art Hive emerged six years ago, ArtStreet was initiated in the American Southwest in the mid 1990s. In an interview describing ArtStreet located at Albuquerque’s Health Care for the Homeless, it sounded a lot like what we still say today: “We believe that art is a voice that refuses to be silenced. ArtStreet is a place to speak without words, to tell the stories that need to be told and to make art that empowers” (Gamble, 1997, p. 32). Whether it is a weekly community art studio, or groups responding to the specific needs of vulnerable populations, or a storefront classroom for Concordia students (Timm-Bottos & Reilly, 2014), the Art Hive provides a potential space for creative community engagement (Timm-Bottos, 2006; Timm-Bottos & Chainey, 2015) (Figure 2).

In ever greater numbers art therapists are opening their office doors and creating safe, welcoming spaces to connect with each other in ways that inspire our imaginations, awaken our hearts and provide places to mobilize collective actions. These liminal spaces are located in storefronts, libraries, social service institutions, museums, schools, religious facilities, and universities and are addressing the growing challenges of a disconnected world by inspiring new knowledge through informal exchanges of differing ways of knowing. What we now see is that we are on the edge of critically reframing, restoring, and transforming art therapy through Art Hive practices (Figure 3).

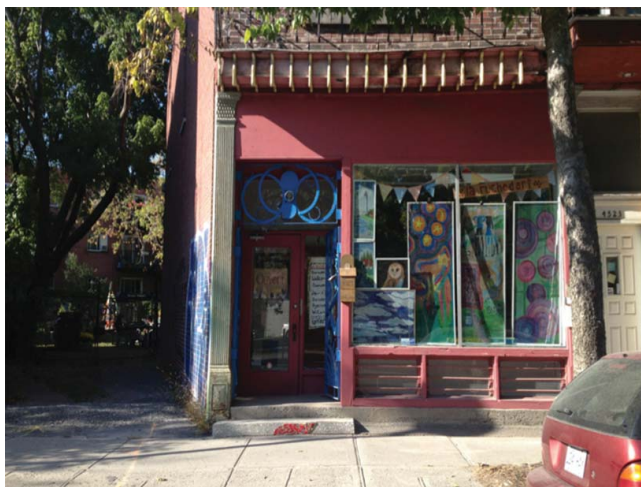


Figure 1. La Ruche d’Art in St-Henri, Montreal. Photo by R. Chainey.



Figure 2. Storefront classroom. Photo by R. Chainey.



Figure 3. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts Art Hive. Photo by R. Chainey.

“Crafts so reversed”

Early art therapists, art educators, artists, and community social reformers provide rich historical material to help inspire what is being revived in the Art Hives Initiative. One example is E. M. Lydiatt (1971). Lydiatt was an accomplished occupational therapist who attended the Birmingham School of Art. From 1934 to 1950 she taught and worked in psychiatric hospitals, setting up different studio-based art therapy programs (Hogan 2001, p. 123). She was inspired by Carl Jung, and like many of her contemporaries believed in the power of spontaneity that leads a creative, curative process. Throughout her life she “remained resolutely convinced of the efficacy of art as therapy” (Hogan, 2001, p. 126). In her book, *Spontaneous Painting and Modeling* (1971) she describes how she was “constantly criticized for not giving interpretations and for not drawing conclusions about patients’ work” (p. 2). Instead, she nurtured a studio atmosphere for self-directed art making, much like the Art Hives where participants are warmly welcomed, given a tour of the non-programmed space and the abundant display of diverse materials. Lydiatt (1971) expands on this way of working: “Firstly, to a large extent I make the environment and convey suggestions by means of the materials. Secondly, I feel that when people are trying to channel the unconscious, technique has to be used backwards, as it were” (p. 15). Referring to “crafts so reversed” (p. 21), she reflected on how the development of arts and crafts skills, as well as talking about the images often

blocked the flow of unconscious awareness (Hogan, 2001, p. 128). Lydiatt (1971) describes her innovative curative process:

One can plunge right in with some materials and feel one’s way from back to front. For example, people can use fabrics and threads directly in place of paint or clay, and with no knowledge of embroidery can sew pictures directly onto material, using any thread and making up stitches as they go. (p. 21)

Other pioneering British art therapists, including Edward Adamson (1990), who coined the term “non-interventionist” art therapy, also developed nondirective approaches, especially working with patients in psychiatric hospitals. “Adamson enabled them to formulate meaning of their predicament; and by mobilizing the creative resources latent within their own personalities, he assisted them to heal themselves” (Stevens, 1990, p. vii). Adamson, Lydiatt and others fortunately documented their life-long experience of learning and working alongside patients to eventually trust the therapeutic effectiveness of nondirected art processes. They passed on a particular determination about the importance of developing one’s own voice and how this strength contributes to “an enabling space” (Stevens, 1990, p. vii), where expression, enhanced by creativity and a respect for autonomy, birthed a “potentially subversive emphasis within art therapy” (Hogan, 2001, p. 213).

Building relationships with each other and the Earth

Today, Canadian art therapists are choosing to find ways to give back those tools of art therapy that were developed alongside patients over many years of sustained clinical practice. Out of necessity we are reviving and innovating new ways of extending art therapy during a critical time when individual pathology and the world’s suffering are aligning. We are beginning to see how art therapists have the potential to mobilize large numbers of people across sociopolitical divides. In a third space, as at the Art Hives, “what seem to be oppositional categories can actually work together to generate new knowledges, new discourses and new forms of literacy” (Moje et al., 2004, p. 42).

As more art therapy students experiment with their own versions of Art Hives, music hives, mobile units, floating units, institutional third spaces, and cooperative art cafes, and experiment with sharing economies,

creative reuse and repairing instead of discarding, the movement becomes a collective work in progress. Energizing new combinations of art therapy delivery are being taken into the world creating noncompetitive relational ways of working (Timm-Bottos, 2016). New clinical theories that are being put into public practice include Kristeva's (2002) 'loving third' (Oliver & Edwin, 2002), where "the loving support of the social" (p. 60) is necessary for the development of psychic space (p. 55). Oliver and Edwin state: "Without social support one is alienated from the world of meaning, which can produce depression and the inability to act" (p. 56). And Foucault's 'ethics of discomfort' (Rabinow, 1994), which reminds us to resist settling into the comforts of our own beliefs. Also, critical to developing a new path in "Public Practice Art Therapy" is the study of indigenous arts and sciences and the understanding of the devastating effects of colonization.

Indigenous science and inquiry remain deeply committed to the teachings of the processes of interdependence of all Earth forms (Cajete, 2000). This differs significantly from the Euro-American model of scientific research, where the scientist is considered separate from the research and seeks "a reality that is independent, prior, singular and definite" (Law, 2004, p. 131). In contrast, indigenous methods are not fixed, independent or separate from social life (Law, 2004). For example, aboriginal peoples from Australia, "generally understand themselves as having a vast repertoire by which the world can be re-imagined, and in being re-imagined be re-made" (Law, 2004, p. 138). "Public Practice Art Therapy" is seeking similar ends, appreciative of indigenous science's reliance on the subjective, the story, the narrative, and the rich and deep metaphors found in so many indigenous ceremonies and stories.

During Canada's controversial 150th anniversary celebration of confederation, the Art Hives Initiative committed to reading and more fully understanding the 94 'Calls to Action' put forth by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). The actions call on all levels of government to work together (Mas, 2015) in order to redress the negative multigenerational impact on communities resulting from 100 years of placement of indigenous children in the Canadian Indian residential school system (Regan, 2010). In response to this call, a small group of citizens at La Ruche d'Art St-Henri piloted a series of

"Community Listening Circles" opened to everyone but directed to settlers, facilitated by two art therapists with the intention of discussing a book by Paulette Regan (2010), *Unsettling the Settler Within*. Emergent in their design, our circles stretched in different directions in response to opportunities as they arose, including: a group visit to Kahnawake Mohawk Reserve adjacent to Montreal, a gift of deep insight and guidance from an Anishinabe grandmother from Parc Laverendrye, Quebec, and the Blanket Exercise¹, an activity led by an Inuit-Chipewyan teacher from the Northwest territories for settlers to explore the history and contemporary relationships between indigenous and nonindigenous people. (Figure 4). The project culminated in an open access online toolkit on how to host "Community Listening Circles"² and an art exhibit, "Reconciliation: What does it mean to you?" that will expand as it travels to Art Hives in eight cities across Canada.

Enabling spaces are necessary in healing relational divides. It is important for settlers to take time to uncover and question layers of racism and hegemony, and witness the resulting pain in order to disrupt colonization practices that continue to play out today. This process of dialogic art engagement (Watkins & Shulman, 2008; Zimmerman & Coyle, 1996) helps remind settlers to practice "noticing before knowing" (Hillman, 1992, p. 129). Something I noticed when taking turns holding a talking stone (that symbolizes a person's time to speak), is how deep listening without comment or expectation, helps keep emotions from prematurely interfering, blocking or misguiding communication. Spontaneous art making also helps to



Figure 4. The Blanket Exercise. Photo by R. Chainey.



Figure 5. Traveling art exhibit. Photo by R. Chainey.

draw something into the here-and-now, in order to see, describe, and name what we can hold from our shared community experience together (Figure 5).

Conclusion

As our “Public Practice Art Therapy” research team continues hosting listening circles, public science conversations and skill shares, we continue to reach out to the expanding network of Art Hives in order to develop meaningful health and resiliency impact indicators that come from the methods, materials and the strengths of culturally diverse communities. Based on “values of community, co-operation, equality, and mutuality” (Elabor-Idemudia, 2008, p. 115), our long-term research goal is to send “community defined evidence” (Martinez, Callejas, & Hernandez, 2010) back into the silos of academia to challenge and inform science practice. It is hoped that through a community-engaged creative arts and sciences praxis, a corrective influence will serve to repair and prepare communities for a type of resiliency that may become necessary for a sustainable future. Networks, like the Art Hives Initiative, are joining many other grassroots organizations across the planet that are also “challenging models of development and advancing approaches rooted in local knowledge” (Elabor-Idemudia, 2008, p. 115). Art therapists have an important leadership role as neighborhoods and institutions are becoming receptive sites for enabling third spaces that welcome everyone to creatively embrace the complexities of our world. “The world around us is also within us. We are an expression of it; it is an expression of us. We are

made of it; we eat, drink, breathe it” (Rasmussen, 1996, p. xii).

Notes

1. <https://www.kairosblanketexercise.org>
2. <https://arthives.org>

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