

Voices of ISIS Graduates

~ Celebrating 20 Years of Expressive Arts Therapy Training in Toronto ~



Edited by Nicole Arends

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction by Nicole Arends p. 2

ISIS Then and Now by Steve Levine (Co-founder of ISIS-Toronto) p. 5

Going Through the Fire: Teaching and Training at ISIS by Ellen Levine (Co-founder of ISIS-Toronto) p. 7

Finding My Way by Rowesa Gordon (1994 graduate) p. 9

Creativity Grounds a Career Expert's Career by Mary Frances Fox (1994 graduate) p. 11

The Importance of Becoming Present by Rachel Goodman (2001 graduate) p. 13

It's amazing how many things are not the end of the world by Samantha Sherer (2002 graduate) p. 16

The Right Road by Shara Claire (2005 graduate) p. 20

From There to Here by Carol Barrett (2006 graduate) p. 23

Coming Full Circle: Class of 2006 by Margo Charlton (2006 graduate) p. 26

The Expression of Pure Potentiality by Nicole Arends (2008 graduate) p. 31

Set Adrift and Finding Anchorage by Sharon Benson (2008 graduate) p. 35

Bridging Isolation Through Co-Creational Culture by Terri Robertson (2009 graduate) p. 39

The Best Life, Ever! by Elke Scholz (2009 graduate) p. 46

Play and the Expressive Arts: A Daily Practice by Michelle Denis MacDougall (2010 graduate) p. 50

Introduction

By Nicole Arends

“Could we ever know each other in the slightest without the arts?”

~ Gabrielle Roy

(This quote is printed on the back of our Canadian \$20 bill.)

A community. A community of Expressive Arts Therapists in training. A three-year journey of excitement, wonder, learning, anxiety, pain, confusion, healing, and transformation. All the contributing writers in this compilation have undergone the 3-year training program at ISIS-Toronto. They are here to share their learnings, experiences, triumphs, and trials as they express the impact that the expressive arts have had on their lives and careers.

ISIS-Canada (International School for Interdisciplinary Studies) is a 3-year training program in Expressive Arts Therapy (EXAT). Led by founding directors Steve and Ellen Levine, ISIS began in Toronto in 1991 with a small group of people who had a big vision. The year 2011 marks its 20th anniversary and this collection was created to commemorate the accomplishments and impact that the training has had on its graduates over the years.

The intent of this compilation is to bring the alumni together in a way that unites our creative souls and to unleash the voices of the graduates of this exceptional program. While the three years of training is a very intensive and intimate group experience, when we graduate, we move out into the world and into our own experiences separate from the group. This book brings us together again and is a celebration of our achievements to date as graduates in the field of Expressive Arts Therapy. It is a way for us to get to know one another, share our journeys and experiences and to celebrate the learning and application of Expressive Arts in our lives.

When I put out the request for articles to all 164 graduates, I put forth the following questions to encourage and inspire them to reflect on their training and remember a time that was unique for each of us.

- What year did you graduate from ISIS?
- What are you up to now that is Expressive Arts related?
- How has the Expressive Arts field changed your life?
- How do you use Expressive Arts in your current work?
- How is it effective and how has it made an impact on your clients and the people you work with?
- What is one thing from your ISIS training that, to you, was the most valuable learning and how have you applied that in your life?
- To you, what is the spirit of Expressive Arts?

I immediately received many supportive e-mails from graduates enthusiastically committing to writing an article, asking for more information about the 20th Anniversary Celebration event, or simply to thank me for initiating this project. The support from people, many of whom I had never met before, has been warming and humbling.

In receiving the submissions, my desire to get to know my fellow graduates started to materialize. These articles/stories are educational, revealing, and inspiring. They bring us together through our common experience at ISIS. As I read through all the entries, some common themes emerged. The most significant one is that of play and the play space as a place of possibility. Another common theme is the idea of working with our senses and reconnecting with our self and cultivating presence through the senses. Yet another common thread is the idea and commitment of being kind to oneself.

There are many personal journeys expressed here as well as several new pioneering ventures – like Shara Claire’s ‘Relational Improvisation’, or Margo Charlton’s ‘Arts-Based Evaluation’, or Michelle Denis MacDougall’s ‘Expressive Arts Piano’. Mostly, all of these women have gone

through some kind transformation and they share their experiences with us with courage, generosity and with playful hearts.

Thank you, ISIS, for providing us with a play space that helped us develop from a beginner's mind to moving creatively through our training and beyond. Here are the Voices of ISIS Graduates.

ISIS Then and Now

By Steve Levine

Twenty years! How could it have gone by so quickly? Wasn't it just yesterday that, as I was traveling in Europe with Paolo Knill, we happened to stop by a weekend workshop at ISIS-Switzerland and I suddenly had the bright idea: Why not create an ISIS program in Toronto?

I had tried to start a program before at York University when, having returned from a year of training at Lesley College, I was invited by the Dean of Fine Arts, Joyce Zemans, to bring expressive therapy to York as an MA program in Integrated Art Therapy. After I spent three years gathering a dossier that could convince the university authorities, and after the proposal went through eight (!) committees, Joyce suddenly left to become the head of the Canada Council, and the project lost the institutional support that it needed.

At first, I was crushed – it's hard to see a dream denied. But, at that ISIS workshop in Switzerland, I suddenly realized, why wait for someone else to give me approval, why not just find some friends and do it ourselves? Ellen Levine and I had already started an institution before, the Center for the Healing Arts in Martha's Vineyard, and Fran Harwood and I were co-leading the expressive therapy group, "Creativity and the Self," that Ellen and I had begun a few years earlier. It seems like we were fated to go that extra step of starting ISIS together.

As Rowesa Gordon says in her essay in this book, the first year of ISIS was a radical experiment. I still remember music-making sessions in which the students were so enthusiastically engaged that almost all the instruments got broken. And then there was the student who danced in his presentation – over broken glass! And the shocking tearing of the group painting done by a student who felt like the image of group harmony we had shaped was a fraud.

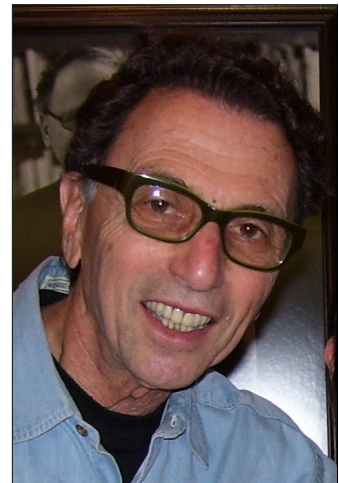
There's been a lot of water over and under that bridge since then. The faculty has changed, and so have the students. Therapy itself has become more regulated and scrutinized. The program itself is not as chaotic or wild as it was – we've learned the importance of frames or structures in

which to hold the chaos, and we've become ever more aware of the importance of the relationships we make in the work and in our lives, and of the way they can become heavy with our previous histories. We've developed theories, written books, taught in other countries, and taken the field into new areas, most recently that of social change.

But through it all, the spirit of ISIS has been alive – the impulse towards play and spontaneity, the love of the imagination, the passion for the arts, the joy of community. ISIS lives! That simple phrase sums it up for me – ISIS embodies the vitality of life that is open to all of us when we step beyond our imagined restrictions and move into the empty space of creation. I hope that, as ISIS continues to grow and transform, it will keep the love of *poiesis* alive and find ever-new shapes to respond to what is needed.

Step forth with courage and make a new world!

Stephen K. Levine is a founder and co-director of ISIS Canada, Professor Emeritus of Social Science at York University, and Vice-Rector and Dean of the Doctoral Program in Expressive Arts: Therapy, Education, Consulting and Social Change at the European Graduate School in Switzerland. He is the author of *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering* and *Poiesis: The Language of Psychology and the Speech of the Soul*, co-author of *Principles and Practice of Expressive Arts Therapy: Toward a Therapeutic Aesthetics*, and co-editor of *Foundations of Expressive Arts Therapy: Theoretical and Clinical Perspectives*. He is the editor of *POIESIS: A Journal of the Arts and Communication*. Steve is the co-editor of the forthcoming book, *Art in Action: Expressive Arts Therapy and Social Change*.



Going Through the Fire: Teaching and Training at ISIS

By Ellen Levine

When Steve and I founded ISIS, we took a chance. We had no idea how it would turn out. We were hopeful and expectant but we were leaping into the unknown. No one knew about expressive arts therapy in Toronto at that time. We were making it and defining it as we went along. It truly has been a work in progress, an improvisation.

Twenty years ago, we were aware that Toronto was not exactly a fertile ground for this kind of work. Today it is even more of a work-driven place where play and imagination are considered diversions. To bring these activities into the foreground and to affirm them as essential to human experience has been our mission. The voices of the graduates of ISIS in this book attest to the important results of this commitment.

These voices also remind me that training to be a therapist is an activity that can break apart and re-shape a person. We used to give the students a paper entitled, “In Grave Danger of Growing,” which pointed out all the ways in which training pushes students to change. Many of the writers in this collection speak about the personal transformations that took place during the course of their training.

Steve and I envisioned the school as a community, and in order to foster that goal, we formed a collective teaching team. We knew that we could never do the job of training students alone. We never thought of ourselves as “owning” the school. For this reason, we also formed ISIS as a non-profit charitable organization with a Board of Directors. Holding the students and the school together while the necessary work of falling apart is being done has required the support of a team and a community. There have been times when we questioned ourselves, and when the ground shook under us. And times when we rejoiced in the beautiful forms that emerged out of the tumult.

There are many layers to the breaking-apart and reformulating process of becoming a therapist. The students have worked with people in so many difficult and challenging situations, holding them in the same way as they hold themselves through the action of the arts. Training students to help people access their resources while they change their lives or their perspectives on their lives requires a double movement: holding and shaping themselves while they hold and shape with others. A complex and rich activity.

As teachers and trainers, we also have been reshaped and changed by the encounter with the students and the many ways in which they have challenged us. We ourselves have gone through and continue to go through the fire. Our teaching team has also changed and grown stronger over the years. We have brought graduates into the team and continue to think of ways to strengthen and expand the teaching base of the school.

When I think of ISIS moving towards the future, I see it always as a place where the fire of transformation can burn and refine those who go through it. My wish for you all is to keep tending this fire and to be able to create the support that is needed to go through it with courage and hope.

Ellen G. Levine is co-founder of and faculty at ISIS Canada, and a Senior Staff Social Worker at the Hincks-Dellcrest Centre for Children's Mental Health in Toronto. She is Dean of Individualized Studies in Expressive Arts Therapy and core faculty at the European Graduate School in Switzerland. She was the founding director of the program in Expressive Arts Therapy and Social Change at EGS. She is an author, co-author and editor of a number of books in the field of expressive arts therapy, including *Tending the Fire: Studies in Art, Therapy and Creativity* and *Principles and Practice of Expressive Arts Therapy: Toward a Therapeutic Aesthetics*. Ellen is the co-editor of the forthcoming book, *Art in Action: Expressive Arts Therapy and Social Change*.



Finding My Way

By Rowesa Gordon

In the Fall of 1990, at the suggestion of my therapist, I took part in a group called Creativity and Self, facilitated by Fran Harwood and Steve Levine. There were about 15 of us and we met for 3 hours a week over the course of that year. The centre was held by and in the arts, with a loose structure, some guidance & lots of permission to explore. The implicit & explicit invitation was to delve into our imaginal worlds and together, play with what we found there. And we did - in a way I had never before experienced. The playspace was crazy, chaotic & tender and when ISIS began the next year, 7 of us from that group enrolled. I knew, in the same way I knew when I came out as a lesbian, that I had found my way home.

When ISIS started in September 1991, the many texts we now rely on, learn from, turn to in the field of expressive arts were yet to be written and we, faculty & students, were forming the programme as we went along. In retrospect, I realize how clearly we embodied Paolo's concept, which he hadn't yet articulated, that we shape the space and the space shapes us. In the true nature of play, we stepped into this first year of the training programme with a sense of wonder, few rules and without any real idea of where we would end up. We were constantly surprised, every week constructing & de-constructing everything we thought we knew. This permission to express, experience & engage with ourselves, with each other and with the emerging images was both exhilarating and challenging, for the exact same reasons.

I arrived at ISIS with a longing for creative community and all the training and teaching I've done, that I do, is informed by this longing, which has never left me. This was the beginning of a journey, a call & response that I followed right into the job of co-director. That was 20 years ago. These days, co-directing with Steve and working as an expressive arts therapist, supervisor and consultant, I'm grateful to be teaching at ISIS. I'm aware of how permeable the line between teaching and learning is, and Tuesday nights with my first year class continues to be a high point in my week. My students bring a richness I could not have foretold into my life as a therapist, as a teacher, as an artist and as a woman struggling to understand what it means to be human in this world, what it is that we're doing with each other and how to do it better.

Over these years, I've formed close & dear relationships with friends & colleagues who remind me that making art is a valuable way to spend my time and they recommend, when I start to lag, that I get back into my studio.

I thank Paolo who taught me to be more directive and as an artist, to intervene with courage. In the early days, when he came to teach, we typically worked all day Friday, Saturday & Sunday often until 10 or 11 at night. Essentially until we were done – so done that we didn't have the reserves to hold back. I still remember when he had us return to the lullabies of our childhoods & we sang them to each other, over and over, late into the evening. That night I learned about beauty.

I continue to be inspired by Steve and Ellen, my first teachers in the principles and practice of expressive arts therapy. They are mentors, as well as friends, colleagues and the best clown parents I could ask for. I've learned, in the many times I've done nothing turns, in my red nose, with both of them there to welcome me, that to be vulnerable is a gift we have to offer.

I believe this field will never be fully formed, will continue to shift & change, will continue to shape us as we, students engaged in the long tradition of the arts, shape it. May we always be there to welcome the emerging images and the surprises they bring with them as we, together in communities all over the world, learn to sit with uncertainty, with the mystery of what is not yet known and respond to the world around us in play and in kindness.

Rowesa Gordon, co-director and core teaching faculty at ISIS Canada, is an expressive arts therapist in private practice who supervises and consults in this field. A graduate of the Ontario College of Art and Design, with a Masters Degree in Expressive Therapies from Lesley University, she has a certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies from the European Graduate School. Rowesa is adjunct faculty at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology and at EGS, where she has been artist-in-residence. Her paintings have appeared in professional journals and have been shown in Canada, Europe and the United States. Primarily a visual artist, Rowesa has been expanding her range of play through voice and dance/movement.



Creativity Grounds a Career Expert's Career

By Mary-Frances Fox

I was a member of the very first ISIS class that started in 1991. I did my practicums at Youthlink, Muki Baum and then at a career counseling centre, because I saw self-formation (the psychology of Winnicott, Kohut and so on), self marketing and self employment as a continuum of emergence as an authentic, thriving person playing in the outer world.

That path was my own developmental journey, and it seemed to be happening a lot more out there, which interested me a lot. My supervisor at Muki Baum was very creative, understood that and encouraged me. At the career centre, my experience with the dually diagnosed enabled me to take on a client with Autism and use the office complex like a play space. This background made it so that I could hold the space during the often lengthy process of putting a new life together when somebody has to, either due to job loss, or (as I eventually specialized in) at those times when somebody just wants their work and perhaps their pay, to give them more.

Early on, I ceased to use art materials in doing one-on-one career counseling, which was often crisis counseling due to clients' job loss. It got in the client's way, and there was at that time no literature on how to bring the arts into career conversations of real depth or practicality, except collages, which every job group was already doing. I stopped looking for that. I do, however, believe in story and I encourage people to believe in and tell the story of their own life above any 'tests' or 'qualifications'.

It turns out what I retain the most from my three years of studies, studio work and fieldwork with ISIS, and that I use constantly that proved so special to people, is to trust yourself. All of life is made up and we can pick any thread and follow it. Knowing what is going to happen is unnecessary. We each hold the boundless creative power to make our reality into how we now [or next] need it to be. People say that I carry this spirit and in our career counseling they receive it, often for the first time in their lives. I know that my ISIS years helped me heal to the point

that I could accept in my gut that life is truly that good, and to show people how to trust themselves.

As well, the attending/listening/containing presence we learned to supply has been very helpful to clients. As far as art-making goes, I also credit my ISIS years for giving me the foundation and ease to continue studio classes when my soul needed to for 15 years since. When engaging my creative process, I am Home. I think I first discovered that in a paper I wrote in 1992! This training gave me a backdrop to understanding my own development and a credible knowledge and set of processes that I really think I apply subconsciously to this day.

Incidentally, I have been on a payroll for just 2 of the 15 years since graduation. I believe we craft our own opportunities and that relating and giving are the keys to the right opportunities coming one's way.

Mary-Frances Fox

Work Creatively International Inc.

Mary-Frances Fox has a BA in English, college diplomas in Advertising and Fibre Arts, and certificates in Small Business Management, Retirement Lifestyle Planning, E-course facilitation and Built Heritage Planning. She attended ISIS from 1991-95 which shifted her career role from communicator to listener, and sparked what is now 20 years of self employment heading Work Creatively International Inc. where she shows individuals how to have their next boss value them and pick them for roles and pay they truly want. She is currently the Ontario rep for the Surface Design Association of textile artists. She now resides in Hamilton, with her husband Patrick, Rex the dog and 14 pond fish.

www.careerenergy.com



The Importance of Becoming Present

By Rachel Goodman

My name is Rachel Goodman and I graduated from ISIS in 2001. I completed my MA in Expressive Arts Therapy the same year, and moved to Vancouver shortly after graduation.

The Expressive Arts field has changed my life in many ways. When I wrote my thesis on emotional trauma and the body, I gleaned so much knowledge during my research at ISIS and the European Graduate School. The main thing I learned from my work is the importance of becoming present. As part of my thesis, I discovered that if people let new sensory information in, they can find new ways of being in the world and move beyond old stuck patterns. I noticed that the crucial step of becoming present can be a missed opportunity in many situations, thus missing a potential space for transformation. I became very interested in working with the senses to help people become present. Expressive arts is tremendously effective in helping people become more present, as people can have new sensory experiences in a safe environment. This helps them move past old habitual ways of being (eg: body armour, habitual movement patterns, and/or thought cycles) and find a new play space in life.

My work for the past decade has been to create a fusion of expressive arts and fitness, with the intention of strengthening the mind/body connection and helping people become more embodied. I now have an expressive arts studio in North Vancouver where I teach dance-based mind body fitness. The work lends itself beautifully to cultivating presence. Expressive arts give us ways to help people find greater joy in life and this is where the focus of my work is now, in combination with facilitating access to a wider movement vocabulary and supporting physical well being.

The work I do is strongly based in the arts, and involves musical instruments, intermodal explorations, and props such as scarves, hula hoops, and ribbon sticks in addition to more traditional fitness mats, balls, bands, and rollers. I use somatic education techniques, yoga, Pilates, creative dance, and more in my work. I am constantly exploring new ways of working with people, as well as maintaining my own presence practice! Over the past six months, I have

been developing work using musical instruments and rhythm in fitness contexts. I will be releasing a video this spring so people can try this fun and pioneering work at home. I also consult with artists and utilize my expressive arts and dance education to assist them in their creative inquiry. This work is incredibly rich and highly rewarding.

In the future I may extend my practice into the realm of therapy and do trauma work, but for now, what I'm doing feels important to me. Who knew that learning to become present would take ten years so far! The more I practice and learn about presence the more respect I have for the importance of it. I have noticed that when people are present and embodied, they are generally more humane and can be better citizens of the world. This sounds like a funny thing to say, but in my opinion it may be crime prevention, so there could be less traumatized people needing help in the future! People can check their perceptions with their sensations, and come out of trauma loops that may be destructive. As much as people can have new sensations and new experiences, there is an open door to a new future for them.

A large part of the spirit of expressive arts for me is the phenomenological approach: being with what's there rather than trying to explain it all away. Staying present with an image that has information for us can be just as important as staying present with another person such as a client. There was an image from an ISIS weekend intensive with Fran Harwood that I worked with for about five years. If I hadn't stayed in a conversation with that image, uncovering and discovering what it had to tell me, I would have missed out on a tremendous amount of healing.

Another application of the phenomenological approach (which calls for presence) is that from 20 years of working with people physically through dance and/or fitness, I have seen that each person is different on each day, and I can work with them based on where they're at. It's a very organic approach that is not about me imposing my ideas on a person or sounding super smart. It's about them having a creative experience where they are supported in being well.

How exciting that the field of expressive arts is so diverse that we can facilitate self expression, healing, physical well being, community building, coaching, education, and even crime prevention! I feel honoured and glad to be part of such a dynamic field.

Rachel Goodman (Sankeralli) is a dance artist, choreographer, teacher, and the Director of Alchemy Centre. She has a BFA Specialized Honours in Dance and a Master's degree in Expressive Arts Therapy. Rachel is a Can-Fit-Pro certified personal trainer, BCRPA registered group fitness leader, and a trained yoga and Pilates instructor. Rachel specializes in dance fusion exercise, health promotion, movement coaching, and what she calls creative wellness – a powerful and unique blend of creative dance and mind/body fitness. Her lifelong passion for improvisation informs her work, as she believes that play is an important part of life. She is currently choreographing two dance pieces based on universal themes, and forming East Van Jug Band, where each member will be finding and/or creating their own instrument. Rachel will be playing the cheese grater (with thimbles), as well as singing alto.



Celebrate life through movement and sweat!

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www.alchemycentre.ca

It's amazing how many things are not the end of the world.

By Samantha Sherer

I graduated in 2002 from the 3-year ISIS training program and have been in private practice since 2003 in Toronto. My other part-time job is for a family service agency in Toronto working with Separating / Divorcing families.

There is some irony in this current job of mine. During the course of my training at ISIS, I myself got divorced. I had been warned by the interviewers at the application stage that this was a possibility; that the ISIS training is very intense and that many relationships struggle to bridge the gap when one person “does the work” and the other doesn’t. I fluffed it off... “Not my marriage.” I thought... As warned, my marriage fell apart in second year and then shortly thereafter, so did I. To be fair, like so many of us, I came broken to ISIS.

ISIS functioned as a kind of boot camp for me...tore me down and rebuilt me into the person I needed to become. The teardown was relatively quick, only took the first two years of the training, the rebuild took a little longer... about 5 years to get back on track. My health, both physical and mental, deteriorated to a place where work and relationships were hard to hold on to. It was a grueling journey back, but with great support from friends and family and a few arts therapists along the way, I have become the person I always knew I could be.

And through this journey I have picked up a kind of compassion that I was not capable of before. It is this compassion that drives my practice and is making me the therapist I knew I could be. As a true experiential learner, I am able to understand many of my client’s difficulties in adjusting to and accepting their lives as a result of learning to live with my own struggles.

One particular client, clearly articulated an “aha” that resonated so strongly for me. With her permission I quote her here. After a long and difficult journey, she came to me in my private practice. Through the accumulation of skills she learned in several mental health institutions and in my practice through the arts, she has “recovered” and has resumed her very successful life,

after a hiatus of many years. We worked with her body and creativity and metaphor, using Emotional Mindfulness techniques that I initially developed and collected, in part, to heal myself.

Some time ago she turned to me mid-session and stated emphatically, “It’s amazing how many things are not the end of the world.” She was so earnest in this revelation. We paused for a moment to mull this over and then we laughed and laughed. We laughed as the statement resonated with her particular journey. We laughed at the sheer ridiculousness of the thought it supplanted; that life is an emergency and we laughed at all that time she spent being overwhelmed by her life’s struggles. Of course she was unaware while we laughed, of how strongly I could sympathize with this statement, having spent my early years running angrily from one emergency to another. We could laugh at all this pain because through the arts, she had learned to play with her struggle instead of being swallowed by it.

I have been lucky enough to use Expressive Arts therapy in every single job I’ve had since graduating. I developed an Expressive Arts therapy program in a day treatment mental health unit of a hospital, developed ExArts groups for several women’s and trans people’s agencies, and currently use ExArts therapy in my work with separating/divorcing families at a Family Service agency. I have to do my share of counseling in most of my jobs, but it’s worth it for the opportunity to bring ExArts Therapy into those work environments. I believe we can create a paradigm shift in their models if we do good work and act professionally. It has been my *modus operandi* and so far has been successful for me. I enjoy the challenges of revealing the power of the arts in existing paradigms.

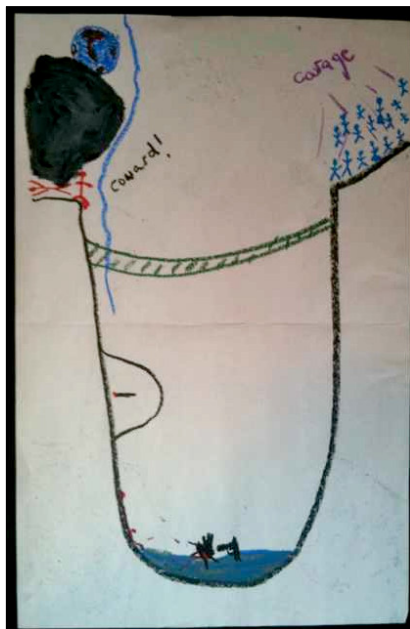
Wherever I have worked, other practitioners have been intrigued by the way the arts can slice through to the heart of the matter, even while the clients are having fun. Sometimes they want to know the ‘secret.’ “What’s the magic activity that I am doing in my office that has clients laughing while achieving insight?” “Play” I tell them. “Art” I tell them. “Gentle accompaniment.” “Witnessing.” “Engaging with.” “Kindness.” “Authentic connection.” “Acceptance.” “Honesty.”

Those are our secrets. Those are the secrets ISIS taught me many years after having left its hallowed halls.

The following artwork was created by the client quoted above and shared with her permission.



A bleak day, painted as a way of soothing some of the desire to cut.



An image of the inner struggle to not engage in self-harm.



An image of the recovery journey

Samantha Sherer is an Expressive Arts Therapist and a certified counselor. She helps people get out of their ruts and feel better so that they can live the life they want. She currently offers talk therapy, counseling and Arts-Based Psychotherapy to youth and adults in one-on-one, couples and group situations. Her credentials include an Expressive Arts Therapy Diploma from ISIS-Canada, a Bachelor of Fine Arts (NSCAD), she is a certified member of OACCPP (certified in the areas of Counseling & Psychotherapy), a member of NEDIC and she collaborates with agencies such as Sheena's Place, Women's & Trans People's agencies and Family Service Toronto. Samantha has been a working artist and potter since 1994 and continues to explore visual art and writing. She is grateful to have the opportunity to share her experience in a wide scope of international development projects in Latin America and Asia.



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The Right Road

By Shara Claire

I swore I'd bombed the first interview. I'd flown across the country fairly cheekily – thinking I could get into this school without ever having been enrolled in university, contrary to the pre-requisites listed on the website. Then, after a night of nervous insomnia on a friend's living room couch and a morning of fumbling my way through the TTC maze for the first time (I grew up in a town of 300), I found myself seated cross-legged on a pillow in the ISIS space, facing a feisty, tiny woman named Lisa Herman, in – could it really be? – a bit of an *argument* about university education. No, actually, I haven't gone. And I'm happy about that, maybe even proud. I don't think I'm built for it. Necessary? No, I don't think it's necessary. And no, I really couldn't imagine going now – what? I'm 22, Ms. Herman. *Call me Lisa*. Okay.

My second interviewer, Melanie, let it slip toward the end of our interview that Lisa had loved our interview, *especially* the argument (knowing Lisa now, I absolutely get it – at the time, I was befuddled), and that I was in. I called my then-boyfriend, back in Victoria. “Are you ready to move to Toronto?”

ISIS was my Toronto welcome wagon. I loved my classmates, my teachers, the big empty possibilities of the space, pillows on the floor, candle flickering in the centre of our circle, paper and pastels stacked on the shelf in the corner, costumes, instruments, paint. One of my most memorable moments of first year was when Rowesa and Janine, my teachers, brought out what felt like a truckload of toy figurines, and the seventeen of us had our first *spielraum* – open playspace.

That space to play – it's so decadent, so rare, as an adult. As I grabbed the first toy and fell into play-dialogue with a neighbour, I felt immediately the whole mechanism behind why I write stories, why I love improvised music, why I'm crazy about theatre. I need ways to keep playing, to keep sifting through the chaos life is woven from. Ways to contain and interpret and channel emotion.

We went absolutely nuts with the toys that night. After the allotted twenty minutes had passed, Ro and Janine had to dim the lights, yell, ding the bells repeatedly – this *spielraum* had no boundaries. Like children being shaken out of deep dreams, we refused their requests to emerge, sit down like adults, and reflect on the play – or rather, our characters refused. And so rudely! Pouncing, prancing, shrieking “No!” and running away. Obviously, we needed this.

My boyfriend and I broke up about six months after my first year of ISIS began, and I was heart-wrenched and raw in a new city, my old friends five provinces away. It was the ISIS community who cared the most sweetly for me during this time – places to stay, tearful phone calls at midnight, home-cooked dinners and listening ears both in and out of class. I felt soothed by all the love, and bolstered up by the secret power in art-making that my teachers spoke so passionately of. I used the complex emotional layers of the breakup to fuel poetry and monologues that became my studio presentation that year. I felt strong in a new way – *I can take what happens and turn it into art*. And maybe, even: *the harder it is, the better the art will be*.

My 2nd year practicum was no joke – two mornings a week working in Toronto General Hospital’s psych ward on the Eating Disorders Unit, supervised by the incredible Janine Hancock. The large team working with these very ill patients did not mess around, and I felt the dominant tone of medicine, tests, weigh-ins, plastic binders full of reports, charts and nutrition plans. Janine and I stood in the sterile ward, strong but wind-whipped, two brave ambassadors for the unknown, unchartable, undiagnosable expressive arts. We knew the work helped – made a huge difference, even – but how to measure that? How to report on it to doctors and nurses and social workers? It was a constant, nagging question. How can you measure how warm a fire makes you?

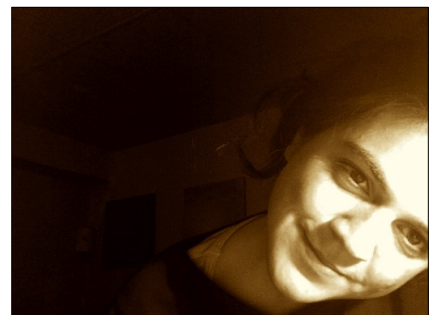
And it was here – with a considerable push from Janine – that I began to lead EXAT groups for the first time, and found that I could do it. I’ll never forget leading a movement exercise for the patients and seeing their fragile bodies tentatively stretch and bend and find a few drops of joy in creative expression. To see these profoundly unhappy young patients smiling and laughing nearly brought me to tears.

The more I began to believe in the process of making art, the more I could lead others through it. If I doubted it and held back, my clients would resist. Janine was a profound inspiration in this regard – she never dimmed her creative spirit and unabashed belief in art-making, not in front of doctors, nurses, or patients.

I taught drumming and percussion to support myself throughout my three years at ISIS, and I continue as an ISIS grad, six years after my 2005 graduation. The way that I teach has been deeply influenced by my training in EXA – I lean much more toward an improvisational approach, now, as opposed to a conventional music class, where pre-written pieces are learned. My students and I have an incredible time exploring what I call “Relational Improvisation,” a concept and practice that I am still hashing out, writing about, and now lecturing on in corporate teambuilding sessions. Relational Improv is a process of discovery through musical expression, via trusting relationship, a commitment to traversing the unknown together, the giving and receiving of honest feedback, “takes” (thanks, Paolo) and balancing play (jamming freely on rhythmic instruments, seeing what emerges) with work (oeuvre, composition, recording, notating, etc). *Can we stay in relationship no matter what happens?* is a big question we ask in Relational Improv. And I feel this same invitation in EXA:

Stay close to the art, to the other, to yourself. We are making something, we are always making, making our life right now. Get inside it and feel it deeply, know it completely, fall in love, even with the rough edges. Feel the very essence of the thing and then find the truest way to say that out into the world. Then others can feel and know it too.

Shara Claire graduated from ISIS in 2005. She lives in Aurora, 40 minutes north of Toronto. She spends her time meditating, indulging her love of language, making and discovering music, and laughing at smart, observational comedians. She grew up in small lakeside towns in BC and misses that, now, in Ontario.



From There to Here

By Carol Barrett

As I prepared to leave Ottawa for the ISIS-Canada training in 2003, the words of my adult children echoed in my ears “Mom, this sounds like a really good program for you. Do you think you will get work at the end of it?” And that question stayed in the back of my mind for the first, second and third year of the ISIS program.

At the end of the first year, a fellow classmate, Jenn Erico, sent out an e-mail asking if anyone was interested in a practicum working with the children at the YWCA Arise shelter as the Mental Health worker – Jennie McKnight had purchased an assortment of musical instruments for the children. Several of us responded and Jessica Vigars and myself, and later Kaeli MacDonald began a practicum at Arise, a shelter for women and children fleeing violence.

Little did I know at the time that I had landed in a learning gold-mine. Learning from the women and children about the effects of trauma, effects compounded by the systems they have to negotiate in rebuilding their lives. A place of learning how to meet the women or children where they are (sometimes around a dining room table) learning how the arts can be a container for unknown or unexpressed feelings, a place of play, a place of possibility, a place of choice and change, a place where both women and children could find their own creativity and resourcefulness through the arts. In addition to this I/we received excellent supervision from Jennie McKnight, who wove her wisdom and considerable knowledge of trauma into our expressive arts practice and who continues to advocate for and expand the use of the arts as part of the healing process in other YWCA programs.

The most valuable things I learned at ISIS: - the client is the expert; being willing to sit in the unknown and work with what arrives; trust the art; have a “wide open blue sky mind”, and the importance of play. The practicum experiences at: Lord Dufferin Public School and supervision with Melanie Nesbitt; Toronto General Hospital and supervision with Janine Hancock were rich places of learning in addition to the placement at Arise.

After graduating in 2006, I was hired in a part time position with the Transitional and Housing Support program within YWCA Toronto. The position was responsible for providing a monthly group at three sites, for women who had left the shelters and were living in the community. There were often several interpreters in the group. The arts became both a container and a bridge when language was a barrier to communication. These women created murals, made music, and danced. They supported each other through many challenging times and the arts connected them.

In 2008, I joined the YWCA Breakthrough program in a full time position. Breakthrough provides four expressive arts groups a week for women who have experienced violence. As a facilitator I am one of the initial phone contacts for women calling the program. I meet with women for an intake meeting before groups start, do follow up phone calls after group with women who might need additional support, meet with clients individually at critical times, provide support letters, refer clients to community workers for housing or other case management issues, meet with facilitators on the team to plan, de-brief and/or problem solve. The Breakthrough team receives individual and group supervision from Jennie McKnight, who is now Manager of Clinical Services for YWCA Toronto.

Who are Breakthrough clients? They are women who have experienced physical, verbal, emotional, financial or sexual abuse. Women who have been isolated from friends and family. Women who have not had a voice or choice in making decisions in their lives. Women who have not been “seen” or “heard”. Women who have been told they are worthless, stupid and/or incompetent. Women who have lost touch with who they are, what they want, what their rights are. Women who have panic attacks, nightmares, chronic pain, and flashbacks. Women who find it difficult to trust themselves or others. Women who are courageous, resilient, resourceful and infinitely creative.

What part do the expressive arts play in Breakthrough groups? The mindfulness practices and the expressive arts assist women in reconnecting with their body and reconnecting with their senses. Clients realize their own wisdom, their own sense of capacity, in a place of non-judgement and a place of playfulness. Recently one group member said she wanted to hear from other women in

the group, wanted to know what they would do in a certain situation. She was invited to explore her question through the art and fifteen or twenty minutes later, after diving into the creative process, she had found the answer to her question.

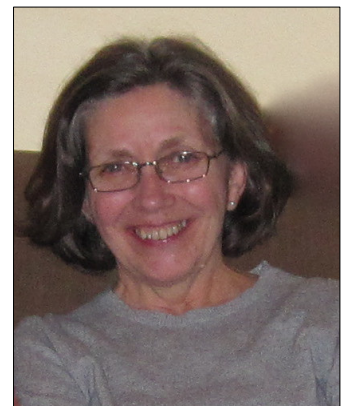
What do clients say they experience? Women say they feel empowered, connected, relieved; that the stress is less – when it is shared, when we make art together; when it is all out there on the paper we can see what we face; when I move the tension goes out of my body; I didn't know I could write a poem; I find out new things about group members when I see their art; I can be part of something, I don't have to do the whole thing myself; I have a voice.

What do I experience from working with the expressive arts in groups? Clients remind me of the places that are my “growing edges” and give me an opportunity to keep growing. I experience an ongoing sense of wonder at what the arts can hold and inspire. I witness a poignant and profound beauty in the intimacy that is shared through the creative process.

Thank you so much to the faculty at ISIS-Canada, Paolo Knill and the many guest teachers for the training that makes it possible for me to do this work. Thank you to all those at YWCA Toronto who create opportunities for women who have experienced trauma to experience the expressive arts in their healing journey.

Thank you especially to all the clients who I learn from every day.

Carol Barrett, B.A. Classical Studies and Communication, University of Ottawa, Dip. ISIS–Canada 2006. Carol began a professional career in England as a dancer with Northern Dance Theatre (now Northern Ballet Theatre); London Festival Ballet (now English National Ballet); New London Ballet as well as freelance work in TV, film and pantomime. In Ottawa, Carol taught both children and adult dance classes at The School of Dance and National Capital Dance Educators, and has worked with children, families and seniors in the community. Carol is a mother, grandmother and Expressive Arts Therapist. 1carolbarrett@gmail.com



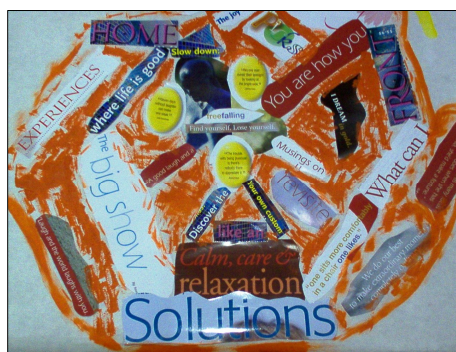
Coming Full Circle: Class of 2006

By Margo Charlton

Little did I know when I enrolled at ISIS in 2003 that instead of moving into a new career path I would end up right back to where I'd come from. Before moving to Toronto, I had spent 20 years working in theatre and community arts in Winnipeg. At the age of 50, I didn't want to fight my way into the Toronto theatre scene so I decided to seek a new path. ISIS caught my eye.

Though I had worked in community arts for years, I realized that I had frequently undervalued the role of art-making. I tended to see art as a tool to increase awareness about social justice issues rather than an activity with innate value. Through ISIS I was introduced to ideas that deepened my thoughts about personal and political transformation. I was particularly struck by the concept of *poesis* and how through the act of shaping and engaging in art-making we gain agency and can come to know ourselves.

I hadn't picked up a paint brush since I was a child and was shy and guarded about my writing. ISIS took me out of my comfort zone, gave me confidence to be in the moment, to trust, be patient and see what emerges. I learned to value and welcome the chaos of improvisation and also deepened my empathy for community members who participate in community projects without any arts experience.



Collage and painting created by participants in Jumbli's Theatre's Arts for All Program at Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre. The collage was a response to participating in a theatre project in 2005 entitled *Your Name Is Written in the Sky*.

ISIS training provided me with words for a state of being I had entered into before but could not articulate – the out-of-everyday-life zone created by art-making. Anthropologist Victor Turner calls this in-between state *liminality*, and the connections created by entering into activities and

space separate from everyday life he calls *communitas*. In that special liminal space I have witnessed groups discovering the joys of shaping material while also finding in themselves a sense of agency to access more possibilities in everyday life.

Not surprisingly, my big breakthrough in rethinking community arts came through the studio weekends when as a group we shared our artistic and personal explorations with the whole school. Packed into the room, we waited to present and receive; words spilled, paint splattered, bodies inched along the floor, drapes and ropes swung from the ceiling, and music bounced off the walls. Walking into the space and facing the community alone was humbling and scary.

But time spent in those weekends helped me see the power of art speaking to art. The aesthetic responses I received to my presentation were visceral, symbolic, disturbing and touching. I used this experience to look at how community-engaged work is evaluated. Statistics cannot fully express the scope of community arts work and neither can questionnaires nor interviews. I wondered why programs that use colour, movement, texture, sound or rhythm abandon artistic expression when examining the experience. Why not use art to evaluate art?

Inspired by my studies at ISIS I enrolled in the Masters of Environmental Studies Program at York University. I wanted to research community arts and better understand its roots and philosophical underpinnings. At first I thought I was being foolhardy for enrolling in both programs at the same time, but each program strengthened the other and my work in one area deepened my understanding and discoveries in the other.



Group "quilt" collage created by participants in a workshop at Art and Social Engagement Conference, May 2010. Each participant created a square for the quilt to express their response to the conference. Each square contains a pair of hands taken from the conference promotion material. The hands and the quilt shape created a unifying form while each individual was able to express their own perspective.

Using my previous work in community arts and my practicum experience at ISIS, I set out for my Masters to tackle the question: How can the value of community-engaged art be expressed? I followed a line of inquiry posed by Shaun McNiff, a pioneer in the field of expressive arts therapy, who asked “Does the language of inquiry correspond to the expression of the phenomena being studied?” Building on arts-based research practices, I developed intermodal evaluation tools and called them Arts-Based Evaluation (ABE). Creating art as a response to involvement in a project allows participants to reflect and process in a less cognitive manner than answering a questionnaire or being interviewed and it does not separate evaluation from the other stages of the project.



SHUKAR LULUGI (Beautiful Flower) was a community arts project by Red Tree Collective with community partners Sojourn House, Roma Community Centre, and CultureLink. Conducted in 2007, the project worked with refugee women from eight countries to develop interdisciplinary work involving photography, poetic presentation, and visual arts, with themes of home, belonging and memory. The project was shaped and facilitated by Amelia Jimenez, Lynn Hutchinson, Margo Charlton and John Pinel Donoghue with funding from Ontario Arts Council, Canada Council, Toronto Arts Council. The image is from the back cover of the book that captured the work from the project. The cover contains paintings done by the participants, one of the poems, and some evaluation comments. For more information www.redtreecollective.ca

In my Masters thesis, entitled *Dancing My Poem: art-based evaluation of community arts*, I addressed many principles of expressive arts therapy, and, as a way of testing my conclusions, I included an artistic response to my research, in the form of a display of memory boxes and a poetry performance, in my thesis defense.

In 2006, I formed a consulting company called Resonance Creative Consulting Partners. The company offers training in ABE and helps arts and community groups find ways to use ABE in conjunction with other evaluation methods. Since graduating I have continued to work on community arts projects but my post-ISIS approach is very different. Now I move more comfortably from writing to visual arts to performance to music. I no longer presuppose the outcome or the benefits for the participants but have learned to trust the moment and move with it. I enter the process with a skeleton of an idea; what happens next emerges out of the art-

making and is as much a surprise for me as it is for the participants. ISIS helped me shift the way I look at things and in so doing I've reengaged my community arts practice.

I have changed personally too. Perhaps the biggest gift I received from ISIS was how to be more empathetic with myself. I spent many years working with others – listening, supporting, encouraging, while my own feelings remained in the background under the fierce glare of my internal and ever-present editor/task master. Being a member of the ISIS community helped me to face fears, recognize my own vulnerability and hurt, ease up a bit and to be kind to myself.

In the end I didn't start a therapy practice or chose a different direction. But with the tools I gained at ISIS, I've turned my old path into something new.



Playing With Words was a community arts project of Gilda's Club and Sistering. Conducted in 2008/2009, the project worked with women dealing with cancer in their lives or the lives of loved ones. The project was shaped and facilitated by Margo Charlton, Zena Lord and Catherine Marrion. The image is a body map created by a participant; the life-sized maps combined writing, images and painting to create a personal portrait. All body maps were installed as an exhibit with artist statements at Gilda's Club in March 2009.

Margo Charlton is a theatre director, community arts practitioner and producer with over twenty-eight years of experience working in professional and community arts. She was the Founding Artistic Director of the Popular Theatre Alliance of Manitoba, a company that created community plays, professional productions, workshops and training events.



Margo has made numerous presentations at conferences, workshops and festivals. Her work in popular theatre, popular education, community arts and arts-based evaluation has taken her to events across Canada and to Cuba, Nicaragua, Panama and Brazil.

Since moving to Toronto in 2002, she has worked on community arts projects for Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre, Sistering, Gilda's Club, Sojourn House and Working Women's Community Centre.

Margo is one of the Founding Partners of Resonance Creative Consulting, a company offering evaluation planning for community development and community arts groups, and training in the use of arts-based evaluation.

She holds a Masters of Environmental Studies from York University (focusing on evaluating community arts programs), BA in Theatre and English from the University of Winnipeg, a Diploma in Expressive Arts Therapy from the International School for Interdisciplinary Studies (ISIS-Canada) and a Certificate in Education from University of Manitoba.

Margo is currently the Theatre Officer at Toronto Arts Council and a researcher for Toronto Arts Foundation where she is part of the planning committee for the recently launched Neighbourhood Arts Network.

Resonance Creative Consulting Partners website: www.resonanceconsulting.ca

The Expression of Pure Potentiality

By Nicole Arends

I had first heard of ISIS-Canada while getting a massage. My masseuse mentioned someone she knew who had graduated from the program. I was intrigued, partly because I was studying Goddesses at the time, and the Egyptian Goddess ISIS is a powerful female energy. I was also in a searching phase of my life, transitioning from the world of being a professional theatre director towards one that involved using my creative skills to be of service to others. ISIS was a perfect fit for what I was looking for – which was essentially an exploration into new and exciting creative territory.

When I began the program, I was working for the Learning Through the Arts program at The Royal Conservatory – a program that sends trained professional artists into schools to help deliver curriculum through the arts. My boss at the time, Angela Elster, who is very familiar with the ISIS training, found out that I was starting my 3-year journey there, and gave me the incredible task of developing and launching a new program called Living Through the Arts. This program was to have a roster of artists from a variety of arts backgrounds to deliver arts-based workshops in different social service organizations. What a challenge! Needless to say, as Rowesa, my ISIS teacher, helped me to understand in my first year at ISIS, having a beginner's mind is essential. Well, I certainly felt like I was at the beginning. Now, six years later, I remember how frightened and overwhelmed I was. How was I to develop a program for a highly respected world renowned organization, when I hadn't a clue where and how to begin? Such was Angela's faith in me and in the ISIS program to help show me the way.

ISIS held me during this time as I learned, laughed, stumbled, cried, and persevered. Some of my favourite learnings from the program include: arts-based intermodal transfers, work-oriented therapy, harvesting, creating frames and holding space, as well as the concept of liminality – that timeless, creative space or zone that we enter into with such courage and emerge having just created something from our souls.

With arts-based intermodal transfers, we move from one art form to another within the same session. For example, you might create a painting while listening to music, and then write a poem based on what you see in the painting, which might turn into lyrics for a song, which you might end up creating a dance for. Moving through a process like this feels like you are in seemingly endless modes of expression, continually shaping and refining the images and creations to reflect yourself in any given moment. I always felt that the most exciting part of these sessions was in the moment *in-between* as we



In my third and final studio presentation at ISIS, I expressed the four elements within me through mask, movement and fabric. With the witnesses in the round, it felt like a womb, a circle (the frame) that allowed for the birth of pure creation in liminal space.

transferred into another modality. Those moments felt ripe with possibility and potential as I opened myself up to what Deepak Chopra refers to as Pure Potentiality.

In my work with Living Through the Arts, I speak frequently at conferences about the work that we are undertaking and I often put forth the question of human potential. What is it? How can we cultivate it, nurture it, make it manifest? I speak about how the arts can take us there, in recognizing the seeds that exist within each of us, and that we are invited to partake in the development of that seed, as our expression of our souls to the world.

ISIS provided me with the ideas, the tools, and a language with which to develop the Living Through the Arts program and I am forever grateful for that. I love the work I do. I love working with artists, partnering with social service organizations, learning more about health care settings and how artists can have a role there. I advocate for the benefits of the arts in health and the necessary cultivation of our creative potential. The Arts help to provide a vehicle through which we make meaning of our lives. ISIS gave me a foundation from which to build the Living Through the Arts program with integrity and purpose. ISIS helped me to speak from

my heart – having experienced personally many breakthroughs in my own creative transformation. We are all survivors in some form.

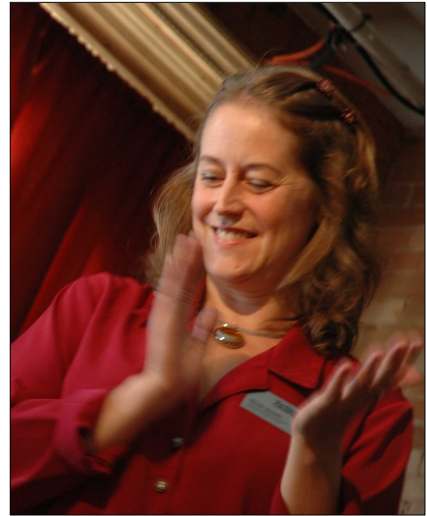
So, how do the concepts of intermodal transfers, work-oriented therapy, harvesting, creating frames, holding space, and the concept of liminality relate to our daily lives? By shifting from one moment to another and being conscious of that shift. Taking what we already have and shaping it, working it, expressing it in different ways (intermodal transfers). By persevering, trying again, looking at what worked, trusting it and building on it (work-oriented therapy). By looking at what we've done, what we've accomplished and recognizing our capacities within that accomplishment. What were my challenges? How did I get through those challenges? What are my resources? (harvesting). By allowing ourselves room to play and explore in a safe place and having a trusted guide or support system that holds us and believes in us (creating frames and holding space). And knowing that the "business" of our lives (our e-mails, our deadlines, our appointments, or our laundry) is not necessarily the reason that we are alive. We live to experience the beauty of our souls and sharing that with others – in timeless moments of creation (liminality).

To me, this is the spirit of the Expressive Arts and anyone who is willing to step into this world, gives themselves a great gift indeed.

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same."

~ Marianne Williamson

Nicole Arends has been working in the arts industry for the past 20 years working as a theatre director, performer, casting director, workshop facilitator, arts administrator, special events coordinator, and fundraiser. Nicole has a BA in Theatre Studies from York University, a diploma in Events Management from Algonquin College, and a diploma in Expressive Arts Therapy from ISIS-Canada. Nicole has worked for such arts organizations as The Royal Ontario Museum, Equity Showcase Theatre, Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People, Theatre Columbus, and Theatre Smith-Gilmour. Currently, Nicole manages that Living Through the Arts program at The Royal Conservatory which she developed in 2005. Nicole is a member of Toastmasters and enjoys writing, mask making, and painting. She is co-creator of the Wisdom Speakers project, a video collection of interviews of extraordinary ordinary people who share their wisdom.



www.TheWisdomSpeakers.com

Set Adrift and Finding Anchorage

By Sharon Benson

*"The greatest good you can do for another
is not just to share your riches,
but to reveal to him his own"*

~ Benjamin Disraeli

When my world as I knew it ceased to exist, I was swept into the abyss without a safe harbour in sight. I was 50 years old. Tossed, churned and whirled by the circumstances of my existence in ways that I could never have anticipated – stripped naked and injected with electric ice water. “If I am to endure this,” I thought, “then I am determined to learn all I can from it.” That was eight years ago. No longer mother, wife, lover and keeper of the home, I embarked on this foreign voyage with my eyes to the stars and my oars in the water, rowing with all my strength. I just wasn’t sure where I was rowing to as I floated in this liminal space. What I did know was that I wanted and needed to return to my beginnings where the arts figured strongly and creativity, honesty, freedom, curiosity and equality were highly valued.

My journey began with taking a course at Haliburton School of the Arts in Ontario called “Freeing the Creative Spirit”. It was here that the Phoenix began to rise from the ashes and a destination appeared on the horizon. There I learned about the arts in a cohesive new way that melded several modalities, allowing expression to be raw and honest, expanded and enhanced by utilizing the entire creative process as a cathartic experience. With the “Expressive Arts” course completed, I was sure that I had found my harbour. For years I chided myself for not being able to focus on one modality. Here was the good news! I didn’t have to! Here being “multi-modal” was a bonus rather than a detriment. The personal shift was monumental, and also seemed so for many others in my group. If the arts worked so profoundly for us in this way, then could I take these skills out into the world to help others as well? How could that be done? Am I too old? What next? I had to seek a new anchorage.

Sometimes the Universe speaks so loudly and clearly that there can be no mistake, unless we are blindfolded and have our fingers firmly stuck in our ears. The term “ISIS” had come up at Haliburton as a possible avenue for more formal education to augment my experience, leading to a new career. I didn’t pay much attention at the time, still reeling from the newness of my situation. But a tangible sign literally sprang up in front of my eyes while I was walking down a lane one late summer’s day, questioning my future. The sign at the end of the lane said “THISISIT” and the middle four letters sprang out at me like a neon sign. “ISIS”. I applied the next day and graduated three years later in 2008. The European Graduate School dovetailed into the experience where skills were honed, academic theories explored, senses ignited and my “Self” stretched like a djembe skin. I will finish my thesis and aim for completion of my Master’s Degree in 2011.

Thus began the adventurous love affair with the arts and curiosity that left me forever changed, and continues to change me yet. It has also provided me with more questions than answers, more experimentation than surety and a conviction that expressive arts therapy has validity and value for a wide range of clientele. So enamoured am I with the concepts and methodology of the low skill/high sensitivity EXA approach to therapy that my focus and intrigue have remained there since.

One of the most influential teachings I gleaned from ISIS and EGS is the need for patience – big silence is okay – and working with what shows up rather than trying to mold a session, client or “result”. The latter has served me over and over again, especially with teens entering group sessions with so much “stuff” from the rest of their day/lives. Often I will abandon the planned warm-up or check-in to run with the temperature and texture of the group arriving.

The same can be said of my own life. Working with “what arrives”, artistically, professionally and personally allows me a freedom from convention and expectation, in addition to enjoying a firmer trust in Universal provision. I take more risks, follow my intuition more often, am more aware of being in the moment and am kinder to myself.

I work with seniors suffering from Alzheimer's and dementia, teens struggling with substance abuse, addiction and behavioural issues, kids on the autism spectrum, and being bullied, as well as facilitating high school spiritual retreats. The group or individual sessions take place on-site or in my Orangeville private practice studio (which I have since closed due to a move north).

The seniors require more structured sessions employing materials that are simple enough for a child but are not perceived as "childish". I found tissue paper one of the most effective.

The teens I work with prefer a more self-oriented group framework. Most appealing materials for these folks are fine markers and theme cards (such as Tarot, Angel, etc.) which engage them quickly, allowing "the third" to arrive and inspire continued exploration and group sharing more readily.



"Order from Chaos" (watercolour) arrived during preparations for my move to Huntsville. The Phoenix rises again from the swirling vortex and biting teeth (or pearls of wisdom?) of the Maelstrom.

Plasticine and drama are the main choices for student retreats, along with ritual and outdoor experiences, while instruments, puppets, paint and costumes appeal to the kids on the autism spectrum. Texture is a big attractor.

I think it is difficult to assess and qualify the impact of this work on individuals. From my perspective, and the feedback I've received from all sectors, Expressive Arts Therapy has opened avenues of therapeutic "progress" when traditional approaches have not been as "successful". A letter of appreciation and acknowledgement from one of my addiction/substance abuse teens brought tears to my eyes. This is my anchor and gauge of effectiveness.

A native of Oshawa, Ontario, **Sharon Benson** is a visual artist and percussion enthusiast currently residing in the woods of Muskoka. A graduate of Haliburton School of the Arts, ISIS and currently working towards her EXAT master's degree from EGS in Switzerland, she is actively involved as an Expressive Arts Therapist serving a variety of populations including seniors with Alzheimer's, and teens and children dealing with challenges such as substance abuse and addiction, behavioural difficulties, bullying, and autism.



www.insight-out.ca

Bridging Isolation Through Co-Creational Culture

by Terri Robertson

I graduated from ISIS in 2009 and for the past few years I have worked in a variety of environments. My ISIS training has lead to several projects, mostly workshops:

From the Bridgepoint Health Hospital practicum working with folks living with complex chronic care issues, I introduced this phenomenology-based method to the attendant psychosocial counseling team. This was a great surprise to the staff and lead to them understanding that we do psychotherapy work. I had been assigned a Recreational Therapist as my supervisor, so there was a little learning there.

From another practicum at a YWCA shelter, in an effort to support several groups of siblings, I engaged the youth in a response using the arts to the art productions created in sessions with the children's group. I produced a video of the animated art work and later documented group process through a graphic short story based on our adventures together.

I have had the pleasure of guest lecturing to the Radio and Television Arts graduates (Ryerson University) on the topic of the new arts-based research methods. This is a lecture followed by an afternoon experiential where we explore a research question through the various arts. The workshop received many positive blog entries from the students, and the professor wrote about the event in her Media Studies blog, Nov.6, 2010 at:

<http://mediastudies.blog.ryerson.ca/2010/11/06/media-memories-serious-play-teaching-creative-visual-research/>

Student responses:

<http://mp8101research.wordpress.com/2010/11/07/junction-triangle-what-is-a-memory-creative-visual-research-joe-recupero/>

<http://mp8101research.wordpress.com/2010/11/10/creative-visual-research-andrew-t/>

<http://mp8101research.wordpress.com/2010/11/12/creative-visual-research-presentation/>

<http://mp8101research.wordpress.com/2010/11/12/presenting-on-creative-visual-research-tricia-collins-nov-6-2010/>

<http://mp8101research.wordpress.com/2010/11/12/visual-research-november-12th-2010-pj-lee/>

On occasion I have assisted Marilyn Oladimeji, from Innovative Healing, with arts-based diversity training to staff at the municipal level (eg. Family Court Services Durham staff and the Durham Cancer Clinic staff).

Ongoing for the past three years is an Expressive Arts Therapy group at Margaret Frazer House that I facilitate. The staff asked for a team-building workshop using the Expressive Arts that I co-facilitated with Marilyn. It went off swimmingly.

Most recently I completed an Introduction to Supervision Training through ISIS where I developed the nucleus of a graphic short story supervision training tool to use with supervisees of Expressive Arts Therapy. Following are three graphic short stories that illustrate three styles of supervision that we learned about: administrative, educative and supportive.

1. Administrative Supervision Style – “Fitting into the Care Team”
2. Educative Supervision Style – “Learning Experience”
3. Supportive Supervision Style, Part 1 – The Practicum Site Event: “Sorry...”
4. Supportive Supervision, Part 2 – Taking it to Supervision: “Knife Knowledge”

While all this has been unfolding, I have been participating in the creation of the inaugural Ontario Expressive Arts Therapy Association.

I made application to and was accepted by the OACCPP. This was an important move because I now have liability insurance for a private practice.

My ISIS experience helped to re-ignite my playful side. I feel that I am a more resourceful artist with freshly honed antennae tuned to the dynamic in the moment, a new ability to unpack and examine complex stories and an extensive array of tricks up my sleeve. I like to imagine that the spirit of Expressive Arts lives on in the dialogues between art and maker.

Terri Roberton, BFA, MLIS, EXAT, is an artist and arts-based community activist, researcher and therapist. Over the last 30 years she has worked with various women's collectives, peace groups, artist collectives, libraries and agencies. Most recently she has sat on the Board of Directors for the Toronto Animated Image Society and helped found the new Ontario Expressive Arts Therapy Association. She has worked with folks at Fred Victor Centre, Margaret Frazer House, Bridgepoint Health Hospital and the YWCA. Terri enjoys working with agency clients, staff and has a private practice.



In her Expressive Arts Therapy practice Terri uses all the arts interactively including visual, kinetic, audio, linguistic and digital to support her clients discovery of useful personal resources. She is working on a biographical animated film, and a collection of graphic short stories based on her experiences.

Terri Roberton
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LEARNING EXPERIENCE

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IN A WOMENS SHELTER I RUN AN EXAT GROUP FOR CHILDREN, 4-11yr. BEFORE MEETING I GATHER THE CHILDREN. ONE MEMBER, QUITE PRECOCIOUS, HAS LEARNED THE ART OF MANIPULATION. THOUGH SLIM, SHE IS HEAVY AS LEAD.



EVENTUALLY I UNTANGLE US AND WE PROCEED TO THE EXAT GROUP.



ooh
PECH!
I feel trapped!

NEXT TIME I SEE HER GETTING READY TO LEAP
DON'T JUMP ON PEOPLE!



SHE DISOBEYS AND JUMPS AT ME ANYWAY... SO I QUICKLY STEP ASIDE LETTING HER BANG INTO THE WALL. MORE KINDLY... ARE YOU READY FOR GROUP NOW? STUNNED, SHE WAS READY TO BE IN THE GROUP.

I took this to two Supervisors. Manipulation?

The Psychiatrist suggested limiting the options to:

- A. Offering the client one thing you want them to do.
- B. And one thing they don't want to do...

In aid of Affect Regulation.

The EXAT PSYCHOLOGIST offered Roleplay:

Whining and simpering she grabbed on to my legs and wouldn't let go until I first panicked then raised my voice sufficiently

"With trauma the boundaries are scrambled. You have to show consequences physically, with voice, and eye contact. To learn appropriate behaviour it's

sometimes necessary to firmly take the outside of the upper arms and move the person away from you with verbal admonishment and eye contact. So they can learn proper limits."

One fine morning at the Homeless Shelter Art Drop-in, the Artists' sense something is awry... out the hall door I spy one of our Artists' DART FORWARD...



hotly pursued by a tall and weedy stranger...



A smile crawls across my face. In my big neutral new size, my heart is oddly calm. My chest and arms morphing into those of an AMAZONIAN SASQUATCH, raise furrily up to block the entrance to the door. After all he was not chasing us.

Firmly I state:

THE KNIFE REALLY WANTS TO GO BACK IN! WANTS TO GO BACK IN! WANTS TO GO BACK IN! THE KITCHEN DRAWER NOW.

It works. The stranger, potential future client, his face a now clearly muddled map, backs off... "OH, SO SORRY." Then he left.

Sorry...

PART 1

Our Artist catches my eye as he slips through to the safe side of the Cafeteria door



Suddenly I feel hyper-alert; antennae feeling for clues; PRESENT.

There is a Pensive Silence in the class behind me. We are all in this process together.

©Terri Robertson 2009

As fire is to a moth, the fracas draws out one of our more fragile artists...



Sweetheart, come back this way. It's safe in here. Come this way. PLEASE. & of

I psychically expand, taking up a larger, transparent space. I go with my senses. My skin is alight with tingly energy, my breathing relaxed

In a protective and conspiratorial whisper I suggest:

"Hi! Hey... we need to keep it peaceful today. Come back when you are feeling better. Maybe you would like to join us next week? (Offer him a graceful way out.)"

He hesitates then steps forward reaching for the door... cunningly switching strategies, I Personify the knife. I feel quite confident.





AS JUDITH HERMAN WOULD SAY "HONOUR THY COPING STRATEGIES ALBEIT WITH CAREFUL REFLECTION... AS ONE NOT EASILY JANGLED..."

The Best Life, Ever!

by Elke Scholz

The other night at a party I was asked how has my thinking changed since I undertook the six years I have been in the Expressive Arts training.

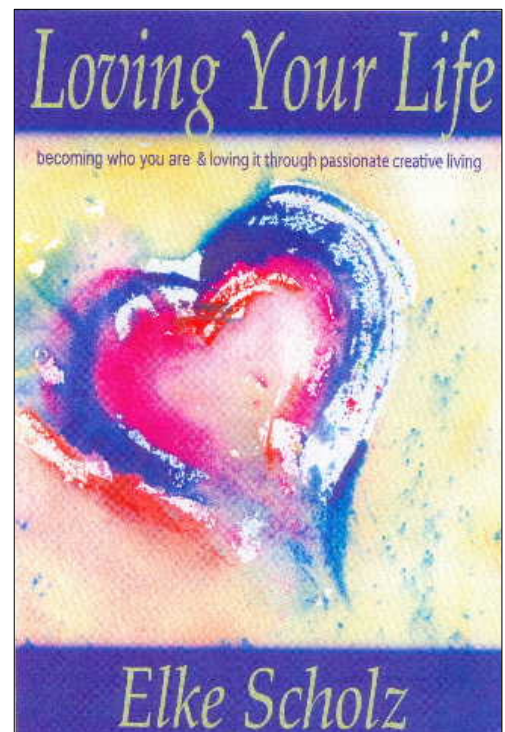
To be accurate I have been an Expressive artist my whole adult life. My book that has sold out, has been slightly revised with EXA language, and is getting reprinted. This book, *Loving Your Life*, is naturally and totally an expressive arts book from my teaching and life experiences. In the book, I talk about the strengths of “integrated modalities.”

I began my formal training at Sir Sanford Fleming’s Expressive Arts intensive program, completing 12 weeks. In 2009, I completed the three year training at ISIS-Toronto and am currently in my final year at the EGS Master’s program in Saas Fee, Switzerland.

Smiling, I said this is all part of my thesis! And then I began to answer. Since my training, five major things have shifted for me in my personal and professional life:

I am more comfortable with the unknown
I am stronger in my intuitive
I can sit in the swamp with myself and others
I am more present and more confident

When I began EXA, I remember how I detested not knowing the plan or routine ahead of time. I had anxiety over new routines and new ventures. As much as EXA and this education was a dream come true, my anxiety



level was very high. I re-mortgaged my house, re-budgeted my finances, rented out my son's room, and set up a local practicum before I was interviewed for my acceptance for ISIS. That was the easy part. Emotionally and physically my stomach was in knots and inside I was shaky.

I could only manage one semester at a time. Even though very resistant, I grew more comfortable in not knowing what lay ahead of anything; a class, travel, my work or a session with a client. This did not happen overnight and I would not have believed I could change that much even though at one time I had wished I could.

In many sessions at all the institutions, the practice of listening to our intuition and urges has made them stronger. I rely on my intuition and urges for my whole living and especially in my private practice. As much as I plan my sessions and get ready, I am open to what the client brings. It is their day and time. There are infinite possibilities of what can be brought forward and I rely on my intuition in what to do next. The training has helped me give in to the moment, to be open and curious to what is brought forward.

Time and practice do help. It is an ongoing process, albeit not an excoriating one any more.

I pride myself on being a positive thinker and being action orientated. I practice the principals of attraction. A few years ago my daughter finally burst into an emotional, crying, gut wrenching heap. She had been holding back her anger and grief because, as she said, she did not want to feel them in case she attracted more of this deep pain. I was set aback. Stunned, I had to rethink positive thinking with realistic thinking and authentic feeling. How do I sit with these dark, sad, yukky feelings in a healthy way and not attract more to myself?

This concept and question is so important as it effects how I live my life, guide my children and work in my practice helping others.

I have learned to not be afraid to sit in chaos, deep grief, raging anger, deep sadness and questions. I've experienced that the intensity can not sustain itself and can move. My learning is how to keep the feelings moving. It's when feelings are stuffed and suppressed that they fester,

grow and attract more of the same and dis-ease. It is hard to sit with someone and their swamp, however it is a journey and work that has rewards of triumph. It is also hard not to solve things and to sit with more questions, though with EXA I can.

Prior to my EXA learning and EXA work, I had a horrible fear of death. Through my Hospice EXA work, working with death and grief has helped me accept my own death and other's death. In my humanness, I still feel the loss of life through death. In accepting death, life has become even more wondrous.

I have practised and studied meditation for many years. I live in nature as much as I can, I begin my day with gratitude, prayer, meditation and a long physical walk in the woods along the river. All this maintenance helps ground me and calm me. EXA has emphasized my own self care.

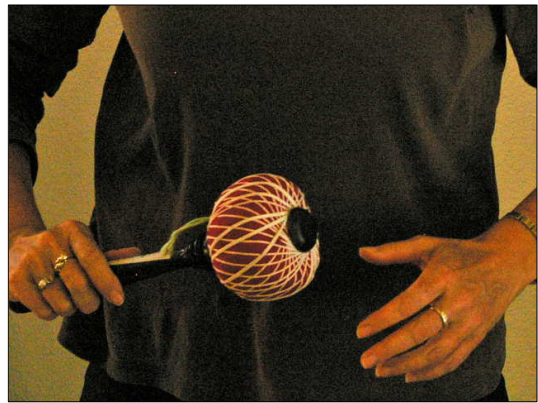


Photo by Hansrudi Rosenmund, Switzerland
"hands / energy / breath in motion"

My EXA training has given me a way to express myself with the arts in an organized way. I can bring myself and/or a situation to a session, go into the arts and am able to 'harvest' the new stimulation/ideas my brain has experienced. It has given me a way to understand non-verbal sensations and to get them outside of myself with the arts. With this practice, I can do this artfully or verbally.

EXA has fast forwarded peeling away personal onion skin layers of healing to where I am now. I feel more authentic and grounded in all respects. I feel my life makes a little bit of sense now and again. Many days I feel satisfied.

My life is the best it has ever been and I am the happiest I have ever been.

Elke Scholz, EXA

Elke Scholz is a well known artist and an Expressive Arts Therapist. She is working on her Masters in Expressive Arts Therapy, Coaching, Consulting and Education. She holds a post graduate certificate in Expressive Arts with Fleming College and a Diploma as an Expressive Arts Therapist from ISIS Canada. She is a member of IEATA and OACCPP.

Elke has been helping people since 1980. Her calm approach invites a comfortable space for people to try new things.

Her acute awareness and high sensitivity are tremendous assets for her clients and make her unique in her field. Elke works well with teams of Educators, Corporations, Organizations and Groups.

Elke has spent 30 years painting, art coaching and managing her successful art studio in Canada. As a writer most of her life, she has had her work and articles published in over twelve national magazines and books, along with her book, "Loving Your Life".

For further information about Elke Scholz, Expressive Arts, Private Sessions, Workshops, Seminars, Retreats, International Trips and Educational Programs, call or write for appointments,

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Play and the Expressive Arts: A Daily Practice

By Michelle Denis MacDougall

Expressive Arts Therapy Private Practice

I see expressive arts therapy as a creative, interactive, dynamic process that combines person-centered psychotherapy with the exploration of movement, visual art, music, words, sound, story-telling and play.

At the center of the expressive arts therapeutic process there is an honoring of the client's own innate wisdom. This wisdom is accessed through play with all the senses and through the relationship between the self, the images and the therapist. No experience with the arts is required.

My approach gently encourages mind, body, spirit, breath connection, ritual and play within the different artistic modalities. I am a dancer, musician, artist and lover of play and a gentle and curious companion in the therapeutic process.

I work with

- women, men and children of all ages
- anxiety, depression and other mood disorders
- bereavement and life transitions
- general dis-ease with life

My clients have benefited from the expressive arts therapeutic process by

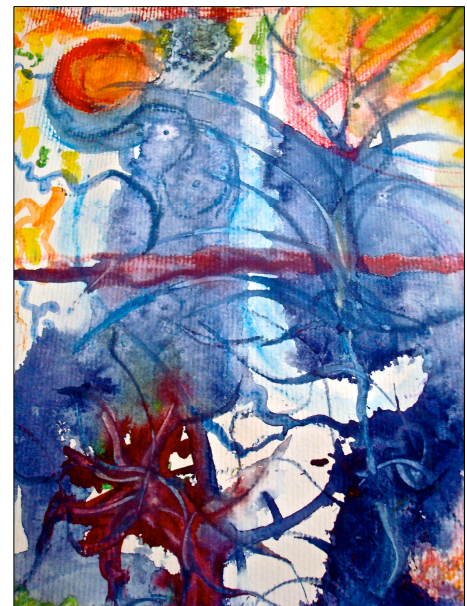
- Working through fears and emotional blocks
- Building trust with self and others
- Accessing gentleness and curiosity towards self
- Accessing and building upon creative, and inner resources
- Discovering and/or fostering artistic passions
- Finding joy and play even through difficult times

Expressive Arts Piano

The idea of expressive arts piano came to me half way through my first year of training at ISIS in Expressive Arts Therapy. I felt a strong urge to find a way of combining an exploration through different artistic modalities while teaching piano. I had no idea how that would look, I simply knew I had to try it. I have now been teaching piano with an expressive arts approach for 3 years.

Expressive arts piano encourages exploration through dance, visual art and story-telling as a way to inspire creativity, and as a way to both connect to the music one is learning, and to improvise and create new music. I teach the basics of piano technique and reading, with a strong emphasis on play and exploration. We choose the music we want to learn together, and I create structures within which the child can feel free to explore their own creativity.

The structure is beneficial to all children in terms of allowing exploration and the cultivation of creative and musical skills. It has been especially beneficial to children who are experiencing difficulties or frustrations in regular school, or who are experiencing some emotional or physical challenges.



Emerge-ency: The Emerging Agency
and The Agency to Emerge

I encourage the children to explore frustrations that come up with learning the piano. As with anything we learn, we inevitably reach points of frustration as we move from one level to the next. I foster an exploratory, creative, process oriented, 'practice, fail, try again' space that not only fosters the children's learning in piano and the arts, but also cultivates a healthy practice of patience, persistence and self-motivation in all areas of life.

I bring the families of my children together twice a year for a community art jam. It is a playful community oriented version of the traditional piano recitals where families are encouraged to partake in some music making and art making, and the children share individual works from their lessons.

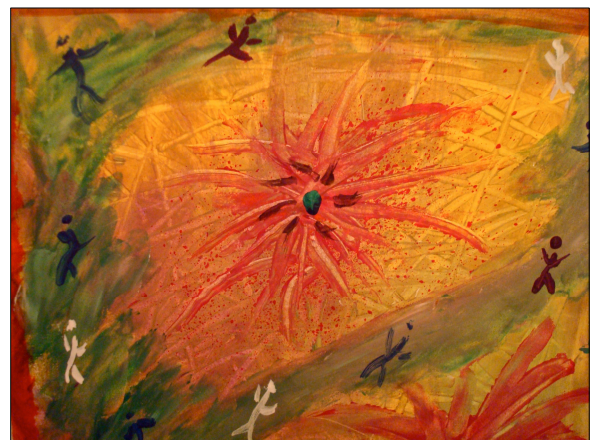
I am joined in this process by the lovely Eunji Kim, colleague, friend, beautiful pianist, passionate artist and expressive arts therapist. Her website is www.eunji.fountaintree.ca.

My Future Aspirations with Expressive Arts

Since graduating from ISIS, I have continued in my studies of therapy through the academic psychology route with the aim of attaining a PhD in Clinical Psychology. On a personal level, I enjoy learning. I want to build my therapeutic toolkit, broaden my experiences, and expand my knowledge base as much as I can. Beyond that, I hope to help build an even greater sense of legitimacy for the expressive arts as a powerful therapeutic tool in the more mainstream realms of health and psychology.

Explicitly, not only do I believe that the arts are deeply beneficial to the therapeutic process, but I also believe that the process of training as an expressive arts therapist is an invaluable experience for anyone working in all realms of psychotherapy, health and psychology.

The ISIS training was instrumental to my continued growth as an artist, and as a compassionate and playful human being. I came to know myself on a deeper level, both the beautiful parts, and the more shadowy parts. I believe that it is essential that any therapist go through the kind of self explorative, transformative, and experiential process that the program at ISIS offers. We cannot begin to help others if we haven't done the work and are committed to the continued practice of knowing ourselves.



Finding Our Way Home

I am grateful that I chose to begin the therapeutic journey with my training at ISIS as I feel it has given me a solid grounding in the experiential practice of being present, attuned, and sensitive to the vast differences in human experience.



Sundance

There are two teachings, among many others, that I take away from my ISIS training on a daily basis. One is the reminder that the unknown place is a transformative place. It can be a dark place, filled with confusion and fear. It is liberating to remember both in the therapeutic process, and in my own life, that underneath the fearful confusion brews the seeds of some kind of transformation, be it little or big. Given space and time, what needs to be expressed will be expressed. Silence and breath are often transformative gifts.

The second teaching is the reminder to play. ISIS deepened my ability to play... with others, with aspects of myself, with the arts and, most profoundly transformative for me... with silliness. Play, in its very essence demands presence. It has the ability to both uproot me when I am stuck in a negative pattern, and it has the ability to ground me when my mind and body are wandering and unfocused. I endeavor to incorporate play into my daily life.

In the spirit of expressive arts, and in honor of one of my favorite expressive and deliciously silly movies, I sign off with...

Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious!

Which I take to mean in honour of love, play, and the unknown, and with immense gratitude to my family, friends, teachers and colleagues.

Michelle Sundance

Michelle Denis MacDougall BFA, EAT, Expressive Arts Facilitator and Expressive Arts Piano Teacher, comes to expressive arts therapy from a background in dance, music, drama, and with a passionate love of and curiosity for people. She was raised in a small immediate family that was connected to a very large extended family. In large families, one does not tend to grow up without having suffered some losses and without having witnessed suffering and many stories of trauma. On the other side of the experience of large families, Michelle experienced and witnessed immense joy, love, support and healing, and came to ISIS already with a deep commitment to community and the understanding of its importance. She currently sits on the Board of Directors with ISIS.



Michelle graduated from ISIS in May 2010. Her experience with ISIS awakened a passion and deep commitment to the art of psychotherapy and deepened her love and respect for the power of the arts as they relate not only to play and creativity but also to their capacity to hold, shape, transform lives and cultivate lively, dynamic and supportive communities.

Michelle's current work in the expressive arts includes a private practice in expressive arts therapy and an expressive arts piano teaching practice for children.

www.sundanceexpressivearts.ca