

CREATIVE EXPRESSION: AN INTRODUCTION

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Creative expression (CE) deals with the development of the person as a whole and aims to create a safe environment where the physical, social, intellectual and emotional experiences of the individual are developed and integrated.

Young children and people with special needs (abused, physically disabled, mentally handicapped etc.) should not be expected to learn performance-based skills as they are still in a process of developing and / or healing. Most product-based activities tend to place great pressure on the person involved since certain expectations and outcomes are suggested or implied. Such pressures should not be present during the development of a child or the healing of a person with special needs since the value of an individual does not lie in his destinations but in his journeys.

However, as imagination plays a very large part in the process of personal development and healing through limited but necessary escape from reality and role-play, one should not see imagination in terms of performance only. Imagination is almost always present in the various aspects of CE.

Furthermore, performance is a means of entertainment while CE is a form of education through communication, art, movement and play. While performance requires at least one spectator to validate its existence, CE does not need an audience since the value lies in the process and not the product.

HOW IT WORKS:

A sense of security: Gaining confidence and building trust are two of the most important aspects of CE. The 1st session should establish certain basic rules (e.g. always take your shoes off when entering the class, stand in your "special place" where no one can touch you, let's stretch out all our limbs etc.) while later sessions should start with this routine to give the participant a certain amount of security before more unknown elements or challenges are introduced.

Meeting challenges: CE aims to stimulate the participant's individuality, creative abilities and lateral thinking through various challenges. This places the focus on the process rather than the product, which allows him to develop life skills as well as confidence in his own uniqueness. During sessions, participants will be challenged on many levels (e.g. let's write our names by using only our bodies, listen to the music and show me how it makes you feel, let's create a storm with our bodies etc.) which he meets at his individual level of ability (be it physical, intellectual, emotion or spiritual).

Each participant in the group should be allowed to do as much or as little as he feels able or willing to, and to interpret the challenge in his own way. For example, if the theme is Animals and a person wishes to portray a lion that eats cake or squeaks instead of roars, he should feel free and confident to do so. His interpretation, imagination and expression are ultimately more valuable in the long-run than his ability to imitate what already exists - which is not a challenge (process-based) but a skill (performance-based).

The role of the teacher-facilitator: The facilitator should never impose his own expectations or abilities on the participant, as this limits the different levels of experience and development for the individual. He should refrain from "showing how", but should rather guide and encourage individuals through the process towards an opportunity where ideas and feelings are shared. The "teacher" therefore becomes a facilitator to the participant's ideas, thoughts, emotions and physical expression and should allow him enough freedom to explore the world as he sees it.

The importance of sharing: Sessions are structured in such a way that there is always time at the end of each exercise or session to share progress or the product of a given assignment, challenge or exercise. Some groups or individuals work faster than others and may be ready to show the rest of the group what they've done, while others will either not be able or willing to show anything.

Sharing is not forced on anyone although they are encouraged to either show or tell the group what they've done or experienced so far. The fact that the individual participated in the exercise is far more valuable than whether there is a presentable result. As the participant becomes more confident in himself, learns to trust others and develops various social and creative abilities, he will also learn that his ideas are unique and special. "Showing and sharing" thus teaches to value and compare rather than criticize and compete.

SOME AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT:

- Challenges (physical, emotional and intellectual)
- Commitment towards others and towards challenges
- Communication skills
- Confidence
- Creativity
- Decision making
- Expression of ideas and feelings
- Goal planning
- Lateral thinking
- Leadership skills
- Motivation of self and others
- Ownership
- Physical awareness
- Problem solving
- Relationship building
- Respect for self and others
- Responsibility
- Sharing
- Spatial awareness
- Support systems
- Teambuilding
- Trust
- Value systems