



Glass, wood, clay – Object seen on Murano

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Abstract

My article is based on the workshop I held at the ANSE 2023 Summer University in Budapest. The workshop gave a taster of art therapy and an art-based group supervision session. Participants experienced how non-verbal expression in the form of an artwork helps us to connect to deeper layers. The verbal reflections of individual perceptions by expressing emotions and associations provide possibilities of gaining new perspectives. Overcoming inhibitions we are carrying about making art and self-expression through our own artwork opens up unknown territories of seeing, understanding and accepting ourselves and others. Learning about our professional identities as supervisors resulting in a profound connection with ourselves and with our intercultural and international professional community.

Art and connection

Art therapy and art-based supervision

Introduction

Having worked with individuals and with various groups also with intercultural backgrounds has made me obtain experience in how art can help us to see ourselves and each other beyond languages that often are not our mother tongue, beyond ways of expressing ourselves that can be perceived differently than how we have intended and how it can help us to set our boundaries, create inner peace and focus even in unsettling situations.

My journey from left-handed clumsiness to art therapy

I always thought I had two left hands. I could not draw, not even a proper circle or a straight line. I was not excelling at all in creative and handcraft tasks. I was ashamed about all that I was trying to do with my hands and imagination. The marks and evaluations I got for these in school did not help either to build up any kind of self-confidence which would have been needed to be able to create art without any inhibition.

I held the belief that I was no good at anything that I had to do with my hands until about my mid thirties. After having had a spine hernia, an intensive psychotherapy I have started to explore various self-growth techniques among which there was a short, four days 'drawing on the right-side of the brain' course. I did not know what to expect but I was going to try it anyway as there was no way my left-handedness could get any worse.

After the course I could draw, shade, see and put on paper proportional and clear drawings. I could even make a

self-portrait. And I was very angry. I was angry because I felt that I was suffering from shame in school for 12 years and as a result of that for decades afterwards thinking I had a "disability" of drawing. And now within four days I have learned that a drawing is composed of lines and I can re-create a Picasso sketch just by drawing the lines centimeter by centimeter not worrying about the big picture but only the lines.

This was the beginning of my path as an art therapist. I had no idea that it will lead all the way there but a tiny seed in me started to sprout which hasn't stopped growing since. I got more self-confident. "If I can do this, I can do more." - I thought to myself. Therefore, I decided to deal with my further inhibitions and misbeliefs. My singing voice was not great either. Once I was asked to go for a walk when participated in the choir in preparation of a student exchange program. School really did not help the attempts of my artistic expression...

As a next step, I went to a singing teacher and asked her to help me find my clear voice. Until then I was afraid of singing even in the shower to myself. After just about 10 sessions I was glad because I had no more inhibitions and my voice suddenly became a much clearer one. I am not going to be an opera singer but I am fine singing along with anybody or just to myself without any discomfort.

And why am I telling all this? It is because in my work as a supervisor, coach and art therapist I find that people carry a waste amount of shame, inhibitions and misbeliefs about

their creative abilities. The abilities that would be tools to relax, to be with ourselves, to create beauty, to connect to themselves, to others, to nature.

As a supervisor, coach and art therapist I find that people carry a waste amount of shame, inhibitions and misbeliefs about their creative abilities.

We don't have to be a Picasso. We can just draw and sing and paint and write. Just as Kurt Vonnegut said once: "Practice any art, music, singing, dancing, acting, drawing, painting, sculpting, poetry, fiction, essays, reportage, no matter how well or badly, not to get money and fame, but to experience becoming, to find out what's inside you, to make your soul grow."

And this is what creating art does to us. It keeps us in the moment and makes our soul grow. Without words, without noticing it happening we end up just being and doing.

So what is a better way to prevent a burnout or to show us with all the symbolism of our subconscious where we stand in a difficult life situation or maybe even what are our resources that will help us to get out of it or achieve a goal.

This was my thinking when I first thought of starting an art-based supervision group.

But going back just a little in time when some of us Hungari-

an supervisors with the initiative of Éva Nemes formed a self supporting learning circle to share about books and studies and to teach each other new tools. Each occasion somebody had the role of presenting something new, something that we can learn from.

I decided to talk about art therapy possibilities in supervision. As I was preparing for our session, I got more and more excited. I always used creative tools in my supervision and coaching work but having thought about it deeply, putting these tools more in a structure to be able to share them made me realize that the possibilities are more than I ever thought before. Seeing the reaction of my supervisor colleagues to creating art and their reflections on it convinced me that I have to discover even more this field. As one of the participants put it at the end of our session: "From now on I will always have a small ball of modeling clay in my pocket when I go to my supervision sessions."

Not so soon after, as I tend to dwell on things a bit longer, I have started an art-based supervision group. One thing led to another and I found myself at the ANSE Summer University holding a workshop for a couple of supervisor colleagues interested in the title and the short description in the programme of "Art and Connection".

The workshop

Since I got the possibility to hold a long workshop, I decided that first I give a taster of the art therapy method I mostly work with which is the Catharsis Complex Art Therapy (KKM*) method" (* KKM is an acronym of the original Hungarian name of this method: Katarzis Komplex Művészetterápia/Catharsis Complex Art Therapy) of Dr. Márta Antalvai.

During these KKM sessions we are in the here and now by creating artworks attuning to the actual nature cycle. During the sessions we paint with aquarelle, draw with oil

and soft pastels, form clay statuettes, create installations with whatever objects are made available for this purpose, make montages with pictures and collages with nature products (flowers, seeds, small stones whatever is available in nature at the given time). In the process there is a guided relaxation, a poem and music to help the connection to our deeper subconscious. We also provide time for reflections, associations and supportive conversations to have a deeper insight of where we are in life, how we stand with whatever is our current topic and the reflections and associations of the group members on each artwork provides a new perspective, a "super vision".

A "super vision" just like in supervision. Art therapy, especially the KKM method with talking about nature and its actual changes which has its similarities to human life's changes (such as letting go, being frozen emotionally, finding new energies in the spring or re-discovering our inner fire) has the same indirect approach in the 'here and now' as in supervision, my first professional identity. So, why not combine it with supervision resulting in an even deeper insight?

This is what we did in the second part of the workshop. We had an art-based supervision session.

First part, KKM method

In the first part of the workshop with a group of six people from Norway, Holland, Latvia and Hungary based on the KKM method, the art created was linked to August and its attributes. After a short introduction of the method we have discussed the basis of our time together.

The build up and instructions of KKM session was as follows:

1. Chose a color of oil pastels and draw repeatedly an inward circling spiral.
2. Chose a nature object from the table's decoration which reflects how you have arrived to our session and helps your short introduction.

3. Using clay, create a the fire element of August which can represent also your inner fire.

Although I planned it, contrary to my usual approach, in this case our time frame unfortunately did not allow relaxation, poem and music in this part of the workshop.

The purpose of the build up of each KKM session is to move from the exact to the more abstract, from the head to the soul, the subconscious but all this with a very gentle, indirect approach.

The inward spiraling circle helps to arrive to the present, to ground. The instruction with this artwork is that the participants can continue making the lines stronger by repeating the hand movement and even try to close their eyes, if they would like, while continuing the drawing.

During my art therapy sessions I do not limit the time given for the creation of the artworks. If needed, I rather restructure my plan within the time frame of our sessions so that the time needed can be spent on what is important for the participants.

The materials used during an art therapy session can have certain effects on us. Many people love clay for example, as it slowly warms up between our hands and gives the feeling as if we were touching human skin. It has the smell of earth and it is three dimensional. However, it can also bring up a feeling of discomfort because we work with our hands as if we were digging in mud and they do get dirty which in our early lives we were often told not to do so.

The fire, inner fire is a theme of August as it is the element of the month often full of heat waves, high temperatures and burning sensations. We have a short discussion about the time of the year, in this case August, about fire and its attributes and what it means to us before creating art.

Once the artworks are created we do give them titles, share feelings that arise in us when we look at them and also



Picture 1. inner spiraling circle, nature products and clay statuette

associations arising when seeing the art created. We do not analyse, judge or advise same as we would not do those in a supervision group.

At the end of the session, we look at all the artwork per individual, in a form of a small personal exhibition to see the similarities, the changes, the artistic path. We often even give a title to this “exhibition”.

I would like to share one of the participant’s clay artwork and her feedback about the session:



Picture 2. clay statuette

“The August fire assignment was challenging for me because I operate mostly on a cognitive level. At first, I was a bit confused because I thought - “Hey, I didn’t understand, there is no specific task, there is only the name “August fire”... What should I do now?” Then I decided to try to let my hands just work, not thinking about what I was going to create, not planning, trying to turn off the rational mind. I myself was surprised that the figure of a pregnant woman was forming in my hands. At first, I had no idea why exactly a pregnant woman. Self-reflection was perfectly guided by group members’ reflections on my work.

I have thought about this event several times since then. Conceptualized, this session initiated an answer formation phase for me about my identity as a supervisor. I have been practicing as a full-time supervisor since 2018. It took 5 years for my “pregnancy” and in your session I realized that it was complete, the fetus - my supervisor identity - was ripe and ready to be born. It has happened. I am now more aware of who I am, what I am as a supervisor. What I like to be. What are my values, goals when I lead the supervision process. I, as a supervisor, am born. Thank you for the opportunity to have this experience. And I bought clay to offer to my supervisees. :)”

Second part, art-based supervision

After a lunch break we continued with art-based supervision. I have prepared with a general case as I was not sure if any of the group members was prepared to bring a personal case in this new environment. However, one of the participants volunteered to share her case regarding a young supervisee with whom the volunteering supervisor had a big age difference and was not sure if the difficulties in the supervision process derived from this age difference which would have meant for her that she should not supervise young adults. After the sharing of the case and the informative questions, there was a guided relaxation and music (Una Mattina from Ludovico Einaudi) and the participants could choose any

of the materials available to put their emotions, visions or anything that came up in them during the sharing and the relaxation. A few of the participants used aquarelle paint, others oil or soft pastels.

During my art therapy sessions I do not limit the time given for the creation of the artworks. If needed, I rather restructure my plan within the time frame of our sessions so that the time needed can be spent on what is important for the participants. However, in art-based supervision each participant create only one artwork in response to the case shared and the time for the artworks created is set. Once the artworks are created, we reflect on them one-by-one letting the case-holder taking notes and reflecting on the artworks (including her own) and on what she heard as reflections from the others.

Below you can find the pictures of the artworks of this session for which I received authorization to share.



Hereby you find the feedback of the case-holder: “Your workshop was very helpful for me. I got a clear answer to my question whether or not I was too old for supervising young adults...You reinforced my capabilities and it brought back memories of my first higher education in the seventies. A study in pedagogic with strong emphasis on art-based learning. I did enjoy the workshop.”

The following is a feedback of one of the participants regarding the entire workshop: “In the room that was set up by you in a very friendly way, with your kind guidance and through the various artistic processes I have detached from my rational, controlling, judgmental functioning and managed to emerge in an accepting, allowing, curious and experimental state of mind. While working with the clay I thoroughly enjoyed finding a playful and “fire like” movement which I kept on repeating with enjoyment: I was throwing with some force smaller pieces of clay onto the paper and those took different shapes when landing. This led me to entitle my artwork “burning forest”. Afterwards, the art-based supervision session followed which together with the questions from the group members moved me. I was concentrating on how we can help the case-holder and this is how my drawing was born in which I tried to express the unfulfillable wish of the supervisee: whoever tried to help her would end up frustrated regardless of the outcome.”

Conclusion

While finishing this article I realize how long I could go on about art as a tool in the supervision and coaching profession. There are so many symbols that can be used in our daily work such as the symbol of a tree connecting earth and sky, past and future and all this with the transcendent. The symbol of a dormant seed hiding in the earth waiting for the first sunshine and rain to arrive so that it can sprout into something new and fresh. I could go on about how drawing (not coloring) of mandalas used in psychotherapeutic art-based

supervision among others to strengthen the boundaries of helping professionals. I could talk about heroes and helpers of fairy tales and journeys and superpowers of these that help our clients to identify their own resources and paths to their solutions and goals. I could write about my gratefulness of my continuous learning during sessions involving art as each artwork opens up a new world that teaches me and immensely enriches my world.

The frame of this article does not allow to further illustrate my enthusiasm about art and art-based supervision but I am sure there will be other occasions to further elaborate. ■

Literature for further exploration:

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