“Imagination is absolutely critical to the quality of our lives. Our imagination enables us to leave our routine everyday existence by fantasizing about travel, food, sex, falling in love, or having the last word—all the things that make life interesting.

Imagination gives us the opportunity to envision new possibilities—it is an essential launchpad for making our hopes come true. It fires our creativity, relieves our boredom, alleviates our pain, enhances our pleasure, and enriches our most intimate relationships.

When people are compulsively and constantly pulled back to the past, to the last time they felt intense involvement and deep emotions, they suffer from a failure of imagination, a loss of mental flexibility.

Without imagination there is no hope, no chance to envision a better future, no place to go, and no goal to reach.

Beneath the surface of the protective parts of trauma survivors there exists an undamaged essence, a Self that is confident, curious, and calm, a Self that has been sheltered from destruction by the various protectors that have emerged in their efforts to ensure survival. Once those protectors trust that it is safe to separate, the Self will spontaneously emerge, and the parts can be enlisted in the healing process.”

Abstract

After a successful pilot program of 10 weeks with women in the New Directions for Veterans program in 2016, and an expanded program of 20 weeks with both male and female veterans in 2017-18, The Imagination Workshop was able to offer another 20 week expanded program including both male and female veterans through their partnership with New Directions in 2018-19. The expanded version included playwriting as an extension of the sequencing of theatre improvisation exercises which culminated in a finished play was performed publicly by the veterans who wrote the play along with the facilitators of the Imagination Workshop. This program and the play was made possible by community arts and cultural grants and also included a new partnership with the California Philharmonic which offered two professional musicians to perform the “soundtrack” for the play live.

I was brought in to evaluate the program with the goal of not only assessing the efficacy of the series of sessions with this group, but also with the goal of understanding the uniqueness of this specific form of theatre workshop in the context of current research on post-traumatic stress. I was also a participant in the entire process including playing a part in the play. A discussion will be offered regarding the therapeutic value of this program and why it can be seen as an important addition to the care, healing and treatment of individuals in groups suffering from the effects of trauma or mental illness in other contexts.

This report evaluates the entire 20 weeks of the program. The group participated in weekly improvisational sessions which evolved into character development, writing individually, then in small groups, and then as a large group, culminating in a full-length one-act play, which they then rehearsed and performed for the public as well as all participants in the New Directions for Veterans Program. The play was created completely in their own words and out of their own imagination. The evaluation of 25 questions on a pre and post-test for the 20 weeks process from beginning to end found significant improvement on five areas and partially significant improvement on an additional six areas. In addition, there was an overwhelming positive response from the participants themselves and the directors of the program. An overview of the New Directions program and the Imagination Workshop is followed by an overview of the 20 weeks, observations, data from the questionnaires, written responses, discussion, writing samples from the play, and recommendations for the future.

Introduction

The Power of Theatrical Improvisation for Healing

The arts are powerful tools for healing trauma as is generally known. How they are utilized for the most part is to provide a way to reengage with emotions and the story of actual trauma that has occurred, leading to integration and freedom from the memories of the events that were devastating and overwhelming. This is the typical role of art and drama therapy in rehabilitation.

Improvisation in the way it is presented by the Imagination Workshop is not focused on healing the past by directly working through it, but by being able to play in the realm of imagination – being able to imagine a life and identity beyond the trauma and beyond being a victim of it.

As Margaret Ladd, the Artistic Director of the Imagination Workshop says, “The ability of the human brain to create metaphors and actually inhabit them, which is the essence of the art of acting – of theatre in fact – contains within it what we feel is a secret antibody to mental illness and despair. It does not touch its causes or its cure. But it allows the brain to reconsider life from a different perspective…This redirection through the imagination, through metaphors, through characters then begins to lead one out of isolation to begin to socialize in positive ways.”

Most people think of improvisation as related to comedy, performance and being quick-witted, but the healing power of improvisation is because at its core, improvisation is about being obvious, and saying or doing the next logical thing; it’s about being authentic. At its essence it is about exploring what it means to be human. Improvisation is an unconditional welcoming of the present moment, full of possibility and hope. This form of improvisation involves the act of seeing through the eyes of someone different than yourself and this is an integral part of working through conflict.
The skills that are developed and facilitated by this kind of group improvisation are, among others:

- Attentive listening
- Being present in the moment
- Expanding awareness and observation
- Letting go of the need to control - or even know - what happens next
- Adaptability to change; flexibility
- Being open to noticing and receiving what the situation is offering
- Taking emotional risks and being vulnerable
- Responding in a way that is supportive and attuned to others, and promotes self-esteem
- Acknowledging interdependence
- Empathy and perspective-taking
- Opening up to previously unimagined possibilities
- Creative thinking and imaginative play
- Experiencing, embracing, and expressing joy

Current research is validating what many practitioners in mental health, as well as artists and teachers who work with traumatized children and adults have known for decades, and that is that mainstream treatments for traumatic stress in general and for military veterans in particular, are largely inadequate for holistic healing and trauma recovery. Ali and Wolfert (2016) state, “There is thus a need for innovative treatment models for traumatic stress that acknowledge potential sources of resilience and healing in veterans’ existing communities. In particular, there is growing evidence that the arts can play an important role in supporting veterans’ recovery from trauma.” (p. 58)

In addition to inadequate treatment for traumatic stress, veterans observe that “the military does an extremely effective job in training them to operate within the military, and an extremely poor job of reversing that training or preparing them before sending them back to civilian life. The basic idea that veterans must embark on a “transition” as they move from military to civilian life has been central for researchers, doctors, policy-makers, and activists thinking about the physical, emotional, and social experiences of post 9/11 veterans.” (Zogas, 2017 p.1)

The Imagination Workshop offers an innovative and effective solution to both of these pressing issues by providing a space for healing traumatic stress, developing needed skills that will contribute to success in civilian life, and offering an opportunity to discover, write, and live a new story of who they are beyond that of their military identity, and being defined by their trauma.

While the Imagination Workshop is definitely not drama therapy per se, it is therapeutic and develops the core skills Nisha Sajnani, Research Director of the As Performance: Theatre and Health Lab states as crucial outcome sof drama therapy in general in her discussion of about the power of drama therapy,

“When we go through highly stressful experiences such as chronic poverty, domestic violence, neglect, racism, or singular events like sexual assault or an unexpected loss, we may experience a disruption in our sense of identity, safety, and connection to others. These ruptures can contribute to anxiety, depression, and emotional dysregulation which may, in turn, prompt helpful or harmful coping strategies such as avoidance and social isolation.
Drama therapy can offer survivors of trauma opportunities to use skills related to acting, such as breath and movement, enrolling and de-rolling, to practice regulating emotional experience and returning to present experience. Through theatre games and exercises, participants are able to take creative risks in a less threatening environment and rehearse challenging social situations.

When conducted in a group, drama therapy can offer children, adolescents, and adults opportunities to experience joy, validation, and connection with others again while making meaning of difficult events.” (2018)

In conclusion, The Imagination Workshop joins other modalities that offer the relational reparative, and creative experiences that are now being identified as crucial for the integration and diminution of the effects of traumatic experiences on the lives of those who are suffering:

“When addressing the problem of traumatized people who, in a myriad of ways, continue to react to current experience as a replay of the past, there is a need for therapeutic methods that do not depend exclusively on drugs, talk therapy, cognitive insight or cognitive understanding. We have learned that most experience is automatically processed on a subcortical level of the brain, i.e., by the unconscious – in interpretations that take place outside of conscious awareness. Insight and good intentions have only a limited influence on the operation of subcortical processes, but synchrony, movement, and reparative relational experiences do.”

Center for Trauma Research, Bessel Van der Kolk
New Directions for Veterans

The New Directions for Veterans program states that Los Angeles has the largest population of homeless military veterans in the nation. The LA Homeless Services Authority estimates that more than 4,000 homeless veterans live on our streets. Many of these men and women suffer from Co-Occurring Disorders, including substance abuse, mental illness and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as chronic medical problems.

Since 1992, New Directions for Veterans (NDVets) has provided comprehensive services to thousands of veterans in Los Angeles County. Founded by two formerly homeless Vietnam veterans and a local advocate for homeless persons, NDVets initially operated out of a five-bedroom home serving eight homeless Vietnam War veterans. They now operate four Transitional Housing Programs, a rapid re-housing and homelessness prevention program called Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), and four Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) facilities in Los Angeles County, with additional projects in the pipeline.

NDVets offers a wide array of services. These include substance abuse treatment, counseling, remedial education, job training and placement, as well as parenting and money management classes. Legal and tax assistance are available, as is an active aftercare program and resources for alumni. Veterans leave NDVets with a savings account, housing, a job or other income, computer skills, renewed self-confidence and the support of mentors and peers. Such a transformation takes hard work, motivation and accountability, but the results are life altering—and for many veterans, life-saving.²

The Veteran Opportunity Center (VOC) houses up to 156 men at a time and is an assessment and transitional housing program for homeless veterans offering comprehensive services for men with Co-Occurring Disorders with fully equipped classrooms for computer training and Adult Basic Education. It is a one-stop vocational rehabilitation center providing employment services, vocational assessment and career counseling.

²https://ndvets.org
The New Directions Oasis for Veteran Women is part of this long-term transitional program and is for female veterans who have served in any branch of the armed forces and who are dealing with issues of homelessness, post-traumatic stress and addiction in addition to other Co-Occurring Disorders such as mental illness and chronic medical problems. It was the first program in the United States designed specifically for female veterans dealing with these issues. Los Angeles has the largest population of homeless military veterans in the nation. The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority estimates that more than 4,000 homeless veterans live on the streets of Los Angeles. While the women served in this program may have a wide range of issues, the only determining factors for participation are being a veteran and being homeless.

The program for the women is divided into two phases, the first is an emergency house where residents may stay for up to 90 days and receive therapy individually and in groups, as well as anger management, parenting, computer and other classes. The second is a residence designed for veterans who are employed or going to school.

**Background**

The only criteria for being a part of the New Directions Program for Men and the Oasis for Veteran Women are being a veteran and having been homeless. There were no discussions about any individual’s diagnosis or personal history before or during The Imagination Workshop, however it is important contextually to make note of the physical and psychological reality of the participants in the program. This is especially important when exploring the nature of the effectiveness of this program.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was only formally recognized by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980 largely due to the efforts of those working with Vietnam veterans. Since then research on all aspects of PTSD has grown exponentially and as a general diagnostic category, it has been a way of understanding the range of responses to traumatic events including child abuse, rape, domestic violence, terror and war.

The ubiquity of trauma is all too well-known now,

“Trauma happens to us, our friends, our families, and our neighbors. Research by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has shown that one in five Americans was sexually molested as a child; one in four was beaten by a parent to the point of a mark being left on their body; and one in three couples engages in physical violence. A quarter of us grew up with alcoholic relatives, and one out of eight witnessed their mother being beaten or hit.”

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Psychological trauma is characterized by helplessness, powerlessness, fear and loss of control in the face of events that are outside the range of usual human experience. The symptoms of post-traumatic stress that occur in reaction to traumatic events generally fall into three major categories: hyperarousal – the unshakable expectation of threat or danger; intrusive sensory, bodily, emotional and narrative memories of the trauma; and constriction – the protective numbing and dissociation in the face of terror and isolation. These responses vary with each person’s unique life experiences in total and the nature of their social support or lack thereof.

According to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) states that the nation’s homeless veterans are predominantly male, with roughly 9% being female. The majority are single; live in urban areas; and suffer from mental illness, alcohol and/or substance abuse, or co-occurring disorders. About 11% of the adult homeless population are veterans. Roughly 45% of all homeless veterans are African American or Hispanic, despite only accounting for 10.4% and 3.4% of the U.S. veteran population, respectively.

Homeless veterans are younger on average than the total veteran population. Approximately 9% are between the ages of 18 and 30, and 41% are between the ages of 31 and 50. Conversely, only 5% of all veterans are between the ages of 18 and 30, and less than 23% are between 31 and 50.

America’s homeless veterans have served in World War II, the Korean War, Cold War, Vietnam War, Grenada, Panama, Lebanon, Persian Gulf War, Afghanistan and Iraq (OEF/OIF), and the military’s anti-drug cultivation efforts in South America. Nearly half of homeless veterans served during the Vietnam era. Two-thirds served our country for at least three years, and one-third were stationed in a war zone.

About 1.4 million other veterans, meanwhile, are considered at risk of homelessness due to poverty, lack of support networks, and dismal living conditions in overcrowded or substandard housing. Due to veterans’ military service, this population is at higher risk of experiencing traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), both of which have been found to be among the most substantial risk factors for homelessness.

81-93% of female veterans have been exposed to some type of trauma – a significantly higher number than within the nonveteran, civilian population. More than half of female veterans surveyed experienced some type of trauma or abuse before joining the military, indicating that the problem extends far beyond the veteran population. Twenty-seven to 49% experienced childhood sexual abuse and 35% experienced childhood physical abuse.

For many, these traumas extended into adulthood, with 29-40% of female veterans reporting sexual assault and about half experiencing physical assault. About 19% of female veterans have experienced some type of domestic violence. Military sexual trauma (MST) in the form of sexual harassment and assault remains a significant concern for female soldiers. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, an alarming 20% of female veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan have been identified as experiencing MST. According to the U.S. Department of
Defense, approximately one in three military women has been sexually assaulted compared to one in six civilians.\textsuperscript{4}

In addition, a new study (Burks, 2011) has found that military veterans who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual are twice as likely to experience incidents of sexual assault while on active duty compared to non-LGB service members. Specifically, current trends from those surveyed in the study indicate that while on active duty, 32.7 percent of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual population – male and female – experienced some form of sexual assault, compared to 16.4 percent of non-LGB personnel.

Of the lesbian and bisexual female veterans who participated in the study, 57.5 percent reported experiencing sexual assault, compared to 37.4 percent of non-LGB female veterans. About 16 percent of gay and bisexual male veteran participants reported at least one incident of sexual assault while on active duty, compared to 3.5 percent of heterosexual male vets.

The experience of trauma prior to enlistment, coupled with trauma experienced while in uniform, make abuse a common denominator among homeless female veterans. The impact of MST is especially pronounced. Female veterans assaulted in the military are nine times more likely to exhibit post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms; are more likely to have problems with alcohol or drugs; have lower economic and educational outcomes; and experience difficulty maintaining relationships, housing, and employment. Even though the female homeless veteran population has tremendous service needs, many of these are going unmet.

According to the pioneering trauma expert Judith Herman, recovery unfolds in three stages:

1. The establishment of safety in terms of being safe in one’s own body, in the world and in relationship with others which includes restoring a sense of personal power and control;
2. Remembrance and mourning involving reconstructing the trauma through telling the story until it loses its power;
3. Reconnection with others and the world, moving toward the future.\textsuperscript{5}

Treatment of PTSD and co-morbid symptoms is complex and multi-layered and most programs including New Directions address all three stages in a variety of ways: medication to balance the neurochemical responses to trauma; top-down methods using talking and sharing stories to experience support, relief, to gain insight, perspective and resolution through individual or group therapy; and bottom-up methods focusing on somatic memories and reconnecting with the body and emotions. These are often integrated with educational and vocational training and many other forms of training and support. Art therapies have been firmly established for years in integrated treatment programs. This includes drama therapy, which has and continues to be utilized effectively, usually focusing on dramatic role-playing and creating dramatizations based upon their experiences.
Given the recent advances in understanding the effects of trauma on the brain, mind, and body, there is a shift in emphasis from talking through and about the past predominantly to bodily-based here-and-now methodologies for fully integrated healing and repair.

In the words of the psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk, a leading researcher on the current state of trauma:

"Trauma results in a fundamental reorganization of the way mind and brain manage perceptions. It changes not only how we think and what we think about, but also our very capacity to think.

We have discovered the helping victims of trauma find word to describe what has happened to them is profoundly meaningful, but it is not enough. The act of telling the story doesn’t necessarily alter the automatic physical and hormonal responses of bodies that remain hypervigilant, prepared to be assaulted or violated at any time.

For real change to take place, the body needs to learn that the danger has passed and to live in the reality of the present. Our search to understand trauma has led us to think differently not only about the structure of the mind but also the processes by which it heals."  

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4 The 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress

5 Herman, J. (1992) Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence – from domestic violence to political terror. Basic Books, NY: NY

The Imagination Workshop

Imagination Workshop (IW) is a non-profit theater arts organization committed to using the unique power of the theater and the mentoring of theatre arts professionals (actors, writers, and directors) to provide life-changing artistic opportunities to those suffering from a broad spectrum of mental and emotional disorders. IW programs give those suffering from mental illness, frequently alienated or overlooked by society, a safe way to express themselves and gain insights that increase the quality of their lives and often help make their lives more successful.

Founded in 1969, IW is the longest-running theater program of its kind. For more than forty years, hundreds of actors and writers from Broadway, film and television, including such well-known names as Susan Sarandon, Ted Danson and Sam Waterston, have, through IW, worked on stage with more than forty-five thousand people suffering mental illness, most of whom have never before experienced theater’s ability to transcend real life.

On stage, those who have difficulty dealing with even the simplest aspects of life suddenly discover that, as a fictional character, they can do all that they ever imagined and more. Through imagination and play the participants develop the ability to imagine multiple versions of any particular story or situation, to be able to see alternate possibilities and to project into the future what possibilities might happen and what the consequences of those outcomes might be. This includes the ability to imagine things being different than they are and to be able to conceptualize what would happen “if” things were different.

The Imagination Workshop program is not therapy formally in any way, but it is therapeutic in the sense of being healing, health-giving, and restorative. By imaginatively creating characters and embodying them there is, in the words of IW founder and artistic director, Margaret Ladd, “redirection through the imagination, through metaphors, through characters that begin to lead one out of isolation and to begin to socialize in positive ways.”

IW helps homeless veterans, psychiatric patients, at-risk youth and other disenfranchised individuals synthesize thoughts and feelings in the realm of metaphor through creating and portraying fictional characters far removed from themselves under the direction of specially trained professional theatre artists. It provides a safe place for adults to play imaginatively as they did when children and because it is only “make-believe”, participants feel free to do and say things in the guise of a character that they may be afraid or unable to express as themselves.
In addition, I have identified specific skills that are developed. These include the following:

- Imaginative Play with Joy, Fun and Humor
- Emotional Self-Regulation and Body Awareness
- Personal Agency
- Thoughtful Risk-Taking
- Patience and Persistence
- Introspection and Self-Reflective Thinking
- Self-Expression
- Empathy and Perspective-Taking
- Interpersonal Communication Skills
- Free Self-Expression
- Leadership and Group Participation
- Creative Thinking

**Imagination Workshop Sequence and Methodology**

The program consists of weekly 1 hour workshops facilitated by two or three theatre professionals of the course of 20 weeks.

**Overview of the 20 weeks:**

The facilitators take turns leading various exercises and all facilitators participate in every exercise along with the workshop participants. I was there to observe (which I explained on the first day) but I also participated in every exercise. This is an important point, in that while there are facilitators and structure, everyone who is there is equally participating fully creating both safety and a lack of hierarchy or the feeling of a teacher-student class dynamic. It is clearly a safe space for play without judgment.

Every session begins in a circle with physical warm-ups and movements, then moves into some form of sound and movement based on a theme where each person does something and then all do what the person created. One of the facilitators would start off with the sound and movement as an example every time. After the warm-up there is a “passing exercise” where one person will take the hand of another, look them in the eyes, and share with them something based on a prompt from the facilitator like, “If I could go anywhere in the world, I would go to….” And then the person with whom they shared “does the same to the next person and in goes around until all have shared.

After that there is some form of creative exercise involving quickly and imaginatively creating characters, metaphors and descriptions and then interacting with the group in some form. These longer exercises always involve each person “performing” in front of the “audience” either alone or with another participant in an improvised dialogue.
The exercises are sequenced and become more complex as the sessions go forward. Everything is totally improvised and fully supported by the whole group with applause after each “performance”. Each person has their moment when the group is paying full attention to them and enjoying their imagination without judgment.

Each session closes back in a circle with each person stating their intention for how the rest of their day will go. After the first 5 weeks, writing was added to each session beginning with a group poem, and then into the writing of short scenes, evolving into character development, a group created story, and monologues. These are currently being developed into a coherent play that will be performed by the group. As a note, after 10 weeks the participants asked for more time to write and we were able to extend the session to 1 ½ hours per week. This speaks to their increased motivation and enjoyment of the process.

The second ten weeks were structured similarly to the first 10 with a few group interactive improvisational exercises at the beginning of the session and then immediately dividing into groups who were working on character development and scenes.

The storyline developed out of the characters they created through improvisation and this was a group process that evolved over the final 8 weeks. The story emerged from the creation of characters all of whom had a secret desire. These relationships were explored through improvisation and through individual and group writing. Eventually the group decided on a place where all of the characters were, a time of day/night, and a common problem they all had to face together.

The story that they created was called the Shadowcaster which is the name of one of the characters who both participates, comments on, and narrates the play. The characters are all in a diner in an unclear location at night with both the characters and the diner being inspired by the image of Edward Hopper’s “Nighthawks”. The participants imagined they were characters in the painting, making up their own who, what, where and when. The conflict was introduced: a blizzard keeping them all from getting to their next appointment, which for each character, was a life changing event.

Some work in the diner, some are regular patrons, and some come in for the first time. Each character is dealing with their own personal issues when they find out that a blizzard has come in out of nowhere, all communication is cut off and none of them can leave. Ultimately, as they sit together, they all recognize what is really important to them and experience a feeling of gratitude for all of the people in the diner. The resolution occurred as they all were forced to stop and look at their lives and what really mattered to them.

The characters were all based on imagination as opposed to the reality of the participants themselves. In many cases they wrote for each other and took on the gender and role of another character. The scenes developed out of both improvisation and writing.

Ultimately the scenes were put together in a coherent narrative and the sessions became rehearsals until they had learned their lines and blocking. Some were still “on book” through the performance and creative ways of having their lines as props on stage were devised.
Additionally, by the time of the performance they all basically knew each other’s lines, which enabled several actors to either improvise if someone forgot a line or prompt someone who forgot.

The group created graphics for the play and t-shirts were created for them to wear. The play was performed on a proscenium stage with lights, sound, live musicians including professional musicians from the California Philharmonic, and visual projections. The excitement was palpable building up to the performance culminating in a group focus process and cheer.

During the play itself, many unexpected things happened including several actors forgetting lines, entrances, and exits. In all cases, one or more of the cast helped steer an individual or the group to the right place. Lines and even songs were improvised on the spot. The flow was never interrupted, everyone stayed focused and the play was a resounding success. They were cheered by the audience which was comprised of fellow veterans from New Directions and the general public.

This is a short video about the process and the play itself:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Xww9dTQ8Y4
Results from the evaluation after 20 weeks

The Study

Participants

The participants in this group were a total of 15 male and female veterans. This number changed over time as some participants transitioned out of the program or moved. Ultimately only 5 participated in the entire process from beginning to end and 1 participant came in for the last half. Nothing was ever discussed about their background historically, their war experience, any psychiatric diagnoses or their future plans. Occasionally there was a passing reference to having been in jail, deaths, using drugs or alcohol, but those were never taken up as a subject of discussion. The focus was always on the imaginative characters and situations created by the group. Over the course of the workshop, given the changes, we had only 6 pre and post tests for this evaluation.

Evaluation Methods

Outcome Measures

- I met with the interested participants at the VA in West Los Angeles and explained the program with them as well and answered questions. I continued to do this as people joined the group process.
- I created a pre-test of 25 questions based on the perceived and desired outcomes of the program as discussed with Executive Director of IW Jim McGrath and based upon my knowledge of trauma treatment. This was given on the first day or when a new participant joined the group.
- I observed while I participated during the course of the workshop and as a performer in the play.
- I gave them the post-test of the same 25 questions after the 20 weeks and the performance of the play.
- I did a debriefing session alone with the group after they were done with the questionnaire and listened to their feedback.

The pre and post-tests measured the following on a five-point scale from “all the time” to “not at all” (See Appendix B for the actual questionnaire)

1. Focus and following directions
2. Listening, hearing and responding to others
3. Remembering many things, steps and ideas
4. Awareness and self-reflection on their thinking, feelings and body states
5. Positive view of self-worth and value as a person
6. Confidence in expressing ideas and feelings to others in a group
7. Thinking creatively and coming up with many ideas to solve a problem
8. Imagining what others feel like and how things could be different from how they are
9. Ease in taking a leadership role and directing others
10. Ease in working collaboratively with others in a group
11. Ease in resolving conflict in relationships with others
12. Confidence that they can do anything in the world and have something valuable to offer
13. Ease in controlling anxiety, fear or worry and deal with situations well
14. Ease in tolerating frustration and having patience
15. Freedom to play and take risks by themselves or with other people
16. Confidence in their ability to present themselves to others
17. Ease in empathizing with other people and understanding how they feel even when disagreeing with them
18. Ability to support others
19. Hope for their future and a strong sense of faith in their own abilities
20. Strength in their ability to put themselves in someone else’s shoes and understand their perspective even when feeling that they are very different from themselves
21. Feeling they are more than anything that has happened in the past
22. A strong feeling of self as they move out into the world
23. Feeling that there are many possibilities open for them personally and in terms of work
24. Feeling that they have integrated past issues and traumas into who they are now
25. A feeling of freedom from having to keep their past pain and traumatic experiences out of their mind.
Statistical Analysis of Pre and Post Tests

The overall score was created by summing the pretest and posttest scores on the twenty questions in the survey. We will refer to these scores as “total pretest” and “total posttest”. We have also created a third variable called “gain” which results from subtracting the total pretest score from the total posttest score.

Table one: Raw data

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Discussion of Findings from the Data Analysis

The findings from the data analysis on this measure show results that correlate with my observations over the course of the 20 weeks, as well as with the statements from the participants themselves and the facilitators. It should be noted that that are many variables that could contribute to these findings as the participants also are receiving ongoing support from various forms of group work such as AA meetings, and other forms of therapy offered by the VA. Below are the areas that showed the most improvement for both groups:

**Significant Improvement on the following in order of strength:**

1. **#20: Ability to put oneself in others shoes and understand their perspective even if different from oneself**
2. **#25: Freedom from having to keep past pain and trauma out of my mind**
3. **#24: Integration of past issues and traumas into who I am now**
4. **#16: confident in ability to present self to others**
5. **#11: Easy to resolve conflict**
Partially Significant Improvement on the following in order of strength:

1. #13: Feeling easy to control anxiety, fear, worry, and deal with any situation well
2. #5: Positive view of self-worth and value as a person
3. #22: Strong sense of self as move out into the world
4. #1: Focus and following direction
5. #3: Remembering things
6. #4: Being aware and reflecting on thinking, feeling and body states

The question that showed the most improvement has to do with empathy and perspective-taking, especially for those different from oneself. This is perhaps due to the intense focus on character development and the interaction between all of the characters in a small space. As the relationships grew, the individual characters deepened themselves and in their connection with each other. This particular play had virtually no physical action and was totally character-driven with the action being more internal changes of attitude and outlook on life.

The questions that also showed the most improvement and growth both related to trauma: freedom from having to keep past pain and trauma out of their mind, and integration of past issues and trauma into who they are now. One of the most powerful statements I heard from a participant was that he was forced to lose his individuality in the military as it was “beaten out of him” and when he came back home, he had no sense of who he was which led to drinking as self-medications for depression. He said that this experience allowed him to find his identity and voice as a human being again and to fully and authentically be himself not only to and with the group, but to an audience with confidence and joy. He cried when he spoke these words and said that the experience changed his life. This kind of transformation and deep experience cannot be quantified and is only hinted at through the data.

The above story points to the next strong area of growth which had to do with presenting oneself to others. For several participants this also included job interviews and a sense of confidence presenting themselves to others both professionally and personally.

The importance of resolving conflict, and controlling anxiety, fear and worry cannot be underestimated. The feedback from the group was very strong in their statements that they felt like they were able to “let go of crises, worries, and problems while in the group”. There was an experience that was shared unanimously by the group – they stated that they “had the freedom to feel silly and felt stress-free”. There were also statements having to do with having been “skeptical at first” and then gradually enjoying the process more and more. The other areas indicate improvement in emotional regulation, leadership skills, supporting others, thinking creatively, having confidence in themselves. And finally areas of improvement involve imagination in terms of possibilities, hope for the future, and faith in their abilities.
Observations

What the participants said based on the post-workshop and performance questionnaire:

1. What have been the most important things you experienced and learned during the whole 20 week process?

   - I came in later in the process. I felt accepted and I felt a part of the group and appreciated. It helped me feel more confident that I can make friends and be included.

   - This helped me in an amazing, wonderful and memorable way!

   - The most important thing I learned is that I can become creative.

   - The most important thing I learned was how to be patient and help others with their roles and confidence.

   - The most important thing I learned was that I could lose myself in such a good way given my present situation.

2. How has this experience helped you as part of your process in moving forward in your life?

   - This experience has helped me enormously moving forward in my life. I can and will do great things in my life to come.

   - This process helped me to enjoy people and company.

   - This experience has assured me that I can still accomplish things on my own.

   - It showed me that by being creative I could inspire myself for a better outlook on my life.

3. How has this process been different from other kinds of therapy or group experiences through the VA or elsewhere?

   - The process didn’t focus on my having been raped by some men but focused on my strengths and creativity.

   - This process was different from other kinds of therapy. It was special, unique, amazing, challenging and encouraging.

   - New Directions providing this outlet is simply amazing. The people who work with veterans are awesome. Please continue to keep them for the vets.

   - This process is different from other kinds of therapy at the VA because it was a group effort and it was good to intermingle with others on a project.
4. **What stood out for you from the process of rehearsing and performing the play?**
   - What stood out was team work and helping each other on the stage. Line from the play “you are the best people I have ever known!
   
   - My self-confident(sic) grew so awesomely. This to me was like a bucket list theme to it. I became an Equalizer, a Super Hero!!! A nerd who became very popular and loving.
   
   - This is the second time around for me and I love doing this. I can’t wait for the next show!
   
   - What stood out for me was being able to focus on things that were pertinent to the play.
   
   - We were involved from top to bottom with the play and the talent level we were surrounded with was incredible.
   
   - What stood out to me was the reaction of the audience.

5. **What would you say to other veterans who are considering participating in another series of sessions and what would you say to administrators about how you feel about the program?**
   
   - We need more programs like this. It is incredibly positive and promotes growth. Imagination Workshop is a progressive positive perfect program preventing possible problems!! It encourages creativity and growth. Thank you for the opportunity!
   
   - I would say to other veterans that you have to experience this!
   
   - I would tell other vets to go for it and allow people to open you up to possibilities.
   
   - I would encourage other veterans to do this, not only for the play but for the comradery of joining together.
   
   - I would advocate to any veteran the benefits of being involved with this production. To the administrators I would dare say this represents everything good about “New Directions”.
6. **What feedback can you give the Imagination Workshop about what we should continue to do or what we could do better? What worked, what didn’t work or what could be added?**

   - All positiveness, we flew upon eagle’s wings!!!
   - Just let people enjoy who they are. This program is perfect.
   - Continue to help individuals to stay focused on what they are doing.
   - I would show the previous year’s play to the vets who might want to be involved with this process. The workshop’s kindness to us was so inspiring. Thank you!

   - **From an Imagination Workshop facilitator:**

   - **Cal Phil Comes Through For the Vets**
   
   “Do your part and open up your heart, create some beautiful art” were lyrics of the closing song “Old As Time” from the original play “Shadowcaster” written by the Veterans of New Directions and the Teaching Artists of Imagination Workshop, with special guest musicians from the California Philharmonic, Principal Percussionist Terry Schonig and harpist Amy Wilkins. So often, I have heard organizations or individuals express the desire to “help the Vets” or “do something for the Vets” but then not seize the opportunity to do so when it comes along. But the California Philharmonic came through, by providing A-list musicians to rehearse and perform with the Vets, on April 5th and 6th, taking the production of “Shadowcaster” to an entirely new level of professionalism.

   New Directions for Veterans is a live-in recovery program which helps our nation’s heroes and heroines address the challenges of life after military service. Imagination Workshop is a theater arts organization that uses theater improvisation for therapy, emotional healing and creative expression. The process of creating the play “Shadowcaster” started in October 2018. We, the artists of Imagination Workshop, paid weekly visits to New Directions on the West Los Angeles Veterans Administration Campus to improvise and write characters for the play. The jumping off point was the image of Edward Hopper’s “Nighthawks”. Participants imagined they were characters in the painting, making up their own who, what, where and when. The conflict was introduced: a blizzard keeping them all from getting to their next appointment, which for each character, was a life changing event. The resolution occurred as they all were forced to stop and look at their lives and what really mattered to them.

   Through the guise of characters, the Vets and workshop artists were able to express feelings and emotions they might not have been able to express while being just themselves. Some beautiful, deep, introspective writing came out in the original one act play “Shadowcaster” and the Cal Phil musicians were there to provide the sonic tapestry.
The production opened with the diner’s owner “Sam”, played by a female US Navy Veteran, singing an original blues song. Terry Schonig’s smooth mastery on the drum kit kicked the number up to new heights. Then Amy Wilkins played the evocative “Gymnopedie” by Erik Satie on harp as the rest of the cast entered the diner in tableau fashion. During the “revelation” of the play, Amy carried the emotions of the scene with another enchanting original harp piece.

Though Terry Schonig, has played on numerous blockbuster motion pictures as well as in the pit for multiple professional musicals and operas, he still expressed his appreciation for being part of such a process, watching the play being built “from the bottom up”, and enjoying meeting and working with the veterans and workshop leaders. To top off the personal connections of the event, both the former air force lieutenant (and superlative bass-guitarist) playing the title role of “Shadowcaster”, and California Philharmonic harpist Amy Wilkins were celebrating their birthdays on the night of the show. It was a touching and heartfelt moment, when, following the performance and Q&A, the stage manager brought out a cake, and the two “birthday kids” blew out the candles together.

Such moving experiences are due to the healing power of music and the arts as manifested by organizations like the Imagination Workshop and the California Philharmonic. On behalf of the Veterans and artists involved, I would like to personally thank the California Philharmonic for coming through with flying colors. With gratitude, Christina Linhardt and the Imagination Workshop.

Discussion

There are several critical aspects to the successful healing of the effects of trauma whether in individual or group work. Among them are those highlighted by the Imagination Workshop: safety and security; reconnection, connections and group support; and being in the here-and-now and imagination.

Safety – Security

As Herman says regarding the importance of safety,

“Trauma affects the entire human organism—body, mind, and brain. In PTSD the body continues to defend against a threat that belongs to the past. Healing from PTSD means being able to terminate this continued stress mobilization and restoring the entire organism to safety. Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health; safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives.”

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The structure of each session and the way of being of the facilitators create a safe environment for individual participants to explore, play and stretch their imagination, as well as the safety to do this with others. A protected space allows fantasy to be freed and the freedom to translate that fantasy into action without fear of mistakes or looking foolish to others.
The creation of a security and safety then allows for the restoration of power and control and the development of a sense of agency. Agency here means the experience of having an effect on others and the world, of a personal sense of being seen and heard by others and of having something to do or say that makes a difference. Through the physical actions of improvising as created characters and interacting in imaginary scenarios, the participants have a safe way to practice and exercise this sense of agency and personal power, which is precisely what is taken from those that have suffered trauma.

Reconnection and Connections – Group Support

When a survivor is in the early stages of recovery and memories of the trauma are powerfully dominating, the imagination is limited and narrowed by helplessness, futility and hopelessness, the hallmarks of depression. Through the safety of a supportive environment created by others who are attuned, resonant and empathic, there is a lessening of the power of the traumatic memories and the ability to both reconnect with lost hopes and dreams and develop new ones. In addition there can be a reconnection with lost aspects of oneself and also the creation of a new sense of self.

The power of true group support cannot be underestimated. Groups provide a sense of belonging, being understood and mirrored by others empathically and is the opposite of the alienation, isolation and shame that accompanies trauma. One of the most telling signs of this kind of safety and reconnection is a decrease in rigidity and an increase in fluidity marked by increased humor, laughter, spontaneity and responsiveness.

The responses from this group clearly speak to the power of the group experience that is provided by the IW and the safety that is created by the facilitators, specifically the amount of laughter, humor and play.

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7 Herman, J. (1992) Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence – from domestic violence to political terror. (p.157) Basic Books, NY: NY
“Social support is not the same as merely being in the presence of others. The critical issue is reciprocity: being truly heard and seen by the people around us, feeling that we are held in someone else’s mind and heart. For our physiology to calm down, heal, and grow we need a visceral feeling of safety. No doctor can write a prescription for friendship and love: These are complex and hard-earned capacities.”

Being in the reality of the present and Imagination

The findings from this study highlight the therapeutic importance of the right timing for a group that focuses on the here-and-now rather than the past or the future in any kind of directive way. Current research on trauma treatment is now focusing on methods that actively provide ways for the survivor in creatively and vitally express themselves, engage with others and explore in the present moment.

The IW games and exercises are continually and fully engaging all participants in the present moment. As one participant said, “there was never any dead air, it was always exciting and you didn’t know what was going to happen next”. It is from fully being engaged in the present that the imagination can be utilized not for creating scenarios of what might happen in the future driven by fear, paranoia or anxiety, by for creative free playing with pure possibilities.

This kind of imaginative combinatory play includes metaphor-making, empathic perspective-taking and placing oneself in another’s shoes or oneself in another possible way of being. The exercise of this skill expands the capacity for holding multiple possible ways of being and of seeing anything. It is also the essential skill in the creation of meaning for one’s life. There are very few places where the imagination is actually exercised deliberately and sequentially, even in all forms of arts learning and performance. The specific kinds of exercises that make up the IW program are specifically designed for this through improvisatory play.

As Bessel van der Kolk says,

“For a hundred years of more, every textbook of psychology and psychotherapy has advised that some method of talking about distressing feelings can resolve them. However, as we’ve seen, the experience of trauma itself gets in the way of doing that. No matter how much insight and

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8 Herman, J. (1992) Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence – from domestic violence to political terror. (p.202) Basic Books, NY: NY
understanding we develop, the rational brain is impotent to talk the emotional brain out of its own reality….Our scans have revealed how dread has persisted and could be triggered by multiple aspects of daily experience. They had not integrated their experiences into the ongoing stream of their life. The continued to be “there” and did not know how to be “here” – fully alive in the present.”

And in the words of the philosopher and aesthetician Maxine Greene,

“If we can link imagination to our sense of possibility and our ability to respond to other human beings, can we link it to the making of community as well? G.B. Madison, writing about the centrality of imagination, says that “it is through imagination, the realm of pure possibility that we freely make ourselves to be who or what we are, that we creatively and imaginatively become who we are, while in the process preserving the freedom and possibility to be yet otherwise than what we have become and merely are” (1988, p. 191)….Those who are labeled as deficient, fixed in that category as firmly as flies in amber, have little chance to feel they can be yet otherwise than what they have become. Marginalized, they are left to the experience of powerlessness unless (usually with support) they are enabled to explain their “shocks” and reach beyond.”

**Conclusion**

When we go through highly stressful experiences such as abuse, war, chronic poverty, domestic violence, neglect, racism, or singular events like sexual assault or an unexpected loss, we may experience a disruption in our sense of identity, safety, and connection to others. These ruptures can contribute to anxiety, depression, and emotional dysregulation which may, in turn, prompt helpful or harmful coping strategies such as avoidance and social isolation.

Exercises, where two or more people improvise or role-play scenarios from another’s point of view, engage the psychological processes that contribute to empathy such as mirroring and Mentalization with a base of respect, a capacity for listening, an acknowledgment of perspectives other than our own, and a willingness to take personal and creative risks together towards a common goal.

Being able to make-believe gives people a chance to try out different possibilities and to create new storylines about their lives in a less risky environment. We can, in fact, rehearse the change we wish to be and see.

Art, and in this case improvisational theatre gives individuals a vital way to express and communicate inner experience which results in feeling less alone. This is important given that

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social support is a critical factor in how we manage life’s stressors, especially for those who have experienced trauma. Art can also bring visibility to people and concerns that we have neglected as a society. With its ability to engage, connect, and sustain us, art and artistic programs such as the Imagination Workshop show great promise in reducing isolation and helping people to recover their creativity, imagine a better future, put ideas into action, and feel alive again.

It is clear from the combination of findings from the pre and post-tests after the first 10 weeks, the observations of facilitators, audience members, and the statements from the participants themselves in combination with my own observations, the IW provides an important therapeutic experience for those that are recovering from any form of trauma.

Specifically, this program addresses the needs Judith Herman identified as phase one of recovery: The establishment of safety in terms of being safe in one’s own body, in the world and in relationship with others which includes restoring a sense of personal power and control, and phase three: Reconnection with others and the world, moving toward the future.

Additionally, through the art of theatrical improvisation the IW sessions provide repeated experiences of being seen and heard by others; listening and responding to others; empathy and perspective-taking; play, spontaneity, fun, laughter, humor, metaphor-making, being and living in the present, and the development and exercising the imagination - free cognitive play with possibilities, hopes, ways of being and dreams.

**Song: Old As Time written for the play by Bobby who played the Shadowcaster**

Can you imagine being around
When life came to be?
The first time I opened my eyes and realized
That I was me.
I’ve been around as long as nature
And natural creativity
A nickel to a dime, a lemon to a lime
I’m as old as time.

Old as Time
Life’s beautiful right from the start
Old as time
Feel the source in your heart.

The world is filled with hate and crime
Go back to what is old as time
It don’t cost a penny, not even a dime
To let it flow, that is so divine.
I long for unity in the world today,
Pay it forward is the only way.
It comes from above, unconditional love
And that is old as time.
Old as time
You have the power and the light
Old as time
So soar and take flight.

We all need to be able to see
Life’s true mystery,
That you love your neighbor as you love yourself,
That love sets you free.
So do your part and open up your heart
Create some beautiful art.
Stop judging and love, because it comes from above
That we’re old as time

Old as time, old as time, old as time….

References


Herman, J. (1992) *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence – from domestic violence to political terror*. Basic Books, NY: NY.


Appendix A

Writing Samples from the play

Excerpt 1:
Frankie: Back in East Los I was popular. May we ran into each other there or something?

Sam: Wait, did we know each other in high school? I know you but it wasn’t Frankie it was Fredrick.

Frankie: Yeah, I was kind of a nerd. I lost weight, got in shape, got tired of being picked on. Now I’m the equalizer.

Violetta: That’s so great.

Robert: Sounds strangely like a dream come true.

Frankie: It’s the life I’ve been dreaming about. I’ve gotten into a different world. The fog has lifted. You know how it is, strong guys with emotions. It takes a woman to slow you down and look at life. A nerd is a nerd who grows out of his nerdie old life. He draws inner strength and power to fulfill his real purpose in life. He dreams of travelling to the most beautiful places of wonder, to fly with the eagles in an endless adventure to the most magnificent, fascinating word. A world I’ve been missing, wanting what some guys have some have all the luck and some have all the pain.

Excerpt 2:
Ace: With that being said, could I have a moment of your time? Much like yourselves I’m unnerved by the fact that I, we, can’t get where I, we need to go. With that I’ve come to the realization that things happen for a reason. I’m meant to be here right now with all of you. In other words, let’s take the time to just be all right with ourselves and each other. Sam, pie for everyone! Let’s look at it like this: maybe we are missing the danger out there. I’ve been in such a rush my whole life. Always trying to force my agenda even against all odds, like tonight. Never accomplishing my goals because of my stubbornness. Anybody for some cards?

Excerpt 3:
Shadowcaster: Tranquility, a snow Mastery of divine intervention with peace, cooling down to create a nominal glitch in our quest for enlightenment. Time as we or you know it, has stood still, to give all the chance to reflect on the unaware sense of being, attached to what you so call living and the way you all call life.
Appendix B
Questionnaire Pre and Post

IMAGINATION WORKSHOP FOR NEW DIRECTIONS
POST QUESTIONNAIRE

Name__________________________________________                             Date________________

This questionnaire is for our evaluation purposes only. All of your responses will remain confidential. Please circle the statement under the following questions that expresses your honest feelings about what is true for you right now in most situations in your life.

Thank you for your participation and help in our quest to make this the most extraordinary program possible!

1. I find it easy to focus and follow directions
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

2. I find it easy to really listen, hear others and respond to them
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

3. I find it easy to remember many things, steps and ideas
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

4. I feel strong in my ability to be aware of and reflect on my own thinking, feelings and body states
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

5. I have a very positive view of my self-worth and value as a person
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

6. I feel confident in expressing my ideas and feelings to others in a group
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

7. I find it easy to think creatively and come up with many ideas to solve a problem
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

8. I find it easy to imagine what others feel like and how things could be different from how they are
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

9. I find it easy to take a leadership role and direct others
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all
10. I find it easy to work collaboratively with others in a group
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

11. I find it easy to resolve conflict in relationships with others
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

12. I feel confident that I do anything in the world and that I have something valuable to offer
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

13. I find it easy to control anxiety, fear or worry and deal with any situation well
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

14. I find it easy to tolerate frustration and have patience
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

15. I feel free to play and take risks by myself and with other people
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

16. I feel confident in my ability to present myself to others
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

17. I find it easy to empathize with other people and understand how they feel even if I disagree with them
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

18. I feel strong about my ability to support others
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

19. I feel hope for my future and a strong sense of faith in my own abilities
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

20. I feel strong in my ability to put myself in someone else’s shoes and understand their perspective even if I feel they are very different from myself
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

21. I feel that I am more than anything that has happened to me in the past
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all
22. I feel strong in my sense of self as I move out into the world
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

23. I feel that I have many possibilities that are open for me personally and in terms of work
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

24. I feel that I have integrated my past issues and traumas into who I am now
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all

25. I feel a freedom from having to keep my past pain and traumas out of my mind
   All the time/Most of the time/Sometimes/Rarely/Not at all
Biography – Victoria Stevens

Victoria Stevens, Ph.D. is a licensed clinical psychologist, psychoanalyst, speaker, researcher and educator. She holds a BA with honors in philosophy, cello and theatre from the University of Kansas, an MA and Ph.D. in clinical psychology from The Chicago School of Professional Psychology (CGI in Los Angeles) and specialized certifications in Hypnosis and the Treatment of Victims and Perpetrators of Violent Crimes. Her psychoanalytic certification is from the Psychoanalytic Center of California, and she has studied interpersonal affective neurobiology with Allan Schore for over 15 years.

Her research specialty is the study of the development and inhibition of creativity in children and adults, with an emphasis on the relationship between creative thinking, neurobiology, emotional development and affect regulation, trauma, the arts and cognitive processes. She has integrated her experience as a classically trained cellist, singer, actress and dancer with her expertise in psychology and pedagogical theory to develop innovative art education curricula and assessments, teacher training programs and trainings for mentors who work with foster children and “at-risk” youth. She is a consultant for A Sense of Home, a non-profit providing homes for emancipated foster youth, and the Imagination Workshop, a non-profit providing theatre improvisation as a form of healing trauma for veterans, psychiatric patients and “at-risk” youth.

She is a founding faculty member of the California Institute of the Arts Teaching Artist Training Program and on the faculty of Antioch University Santa Barbara for the Masters in Clinical Psychology Program where she was the co-creator of the Somatic Psychology and Trauma concentration and certification programs at Antioch University Santa Barbara which started in the fall of 2017. She is on the faculty of the PsyD and PhD Programs in Clinical Psychology, as well as the PhD in Integrated Healing Program focusing on integrated approaches to trauma at Pacifica Graduate Institute. She has been a faculty member at a number of institutions: California Institute of the Arts School of Critical Studies, Mount St. Mary’s College, and the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute for Infant and Child Development. She provides professional development training for teachers in public and private schools across the country on the subjects of creativity, the arts, emotional regulation, imagination, empathy, and metacognition as they relate to life-long learning, academic achievement, and personal fulfillment for all children.