

Large Art Therapy Large Group: Kevin Jones and Sally Skaife

The Art Therapy Large Group is an experiential teaching method in training art therapists developed at Goldsmiths, University of London. Staff and students (eighty plus people) meet six times per year in a large group with art materials for 90 minutes.

Drawing upon the theory of performance art and large verbal group psychotherapy, the art therapy large group can be an effective method of teaching about art therapy processes, whilst at the same time teaching generic skills in health and social care. Through making a mark and finding their voice, students are able to discover a sense of individual and social agency.

The art therapy large group achieves this through providing a psychodynamic frame in which art therapy processes become magnified. Students are active in an experience through which they learn about: institutional dynamics, working with others who are different by role, profession, gender, class or race, as well as about wider social policy contexts and political events.

Performance art challenges the dominant conception of the individual artist providing works for the gallery by a view of art as arising in the dynamic relation between a group of performers and involved spectators. Similarly, the notion of individual pathology, the current focus of mental health provision, is challenged by an understanding of the individual as inseparable from the social group as is described in the large verbal group literature. An educational method which engages the unconscious dynamics of both students and staff and brings this together with an engagement in social and political issues through creative activity is a radical practice in the training of health workers.

Discussed and developed in other experiential and didactic learning settings in the context of the programme as a whole, the art therapy large group experience allows learning that is directly applicable to placement and to students' future professional practice.

References:

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