



Teaching, Training, and Therapy as Gratitude Inspired Art Forms

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I have had the privilege of working with people in many kinds of healing relationships for five decades. You could say I grew up and came of age in the medical-psychological world. In my first professional role as an OTR (Registered Occupational Therapist), the focus was on using art, crafts, and functional activities delivered through the power of the relationship. As an Occupational Therapist I was responsible for providing patients with treatment to help them develop and improve their ability to complete everyday tasks related to their job and daily life. I learned early on that it was not the activities that were my focus - I was always fascinated by the relationship - that is, the mirror of seeing, naming, and connecting through the bi-personal field of the relationship. These are the process elements below the surface that take close observation and attention to words, nonverbal communications, and nuances. This parallels the role of the artist - seeing, observing details, and rearranging elements in a novel way.

Through the years, my love of learning, creativity, and desire to help people drew me into different iterations of therapeutic roles - Creative Arts Therapist, Psychodramatist, Group Facilitator, and Counseling Psychologist.

The expressive arts have always been core to who I am and how I work. As a psychodramatist, the method involves people presenting their issues in action - 'show me rather than tell me.' This creates a real here-and-now experiential type of learning which is uniquely different from traditional talk therapy. I am grateful to Jacob Levy Moreno and his wife, Zerka Moreno for creating psychodrama with its many tools and methods coming from theater, art, and genius originality. Directing psychodrama is a complex set of skills that take

years to develop. Psychodrama action therapy is like creating unscripted improv in the moment. In all these areas where you work directly with people, there is a rich bi-personal field of 'the mirror'.



The concept of the mirror is that it continually reflects self and other – and promotes growth through interpersonal learning – teacher and student, client and therapist, consultant and group or team. I am always grateful to be in such a special, authentic, and deep relationship with people.

It is a profoundly rewarding and intimate experience, a sacred place you share with people. Client-as-artist recreates both internal and external landscapes with curiosity, creativity, and the hard work of mindfully examining the details of their landscape. Slowly their palette shifts and expands to create scenes and landscapes of flow, open mindedness, love, and endless color and texture



combinations. I get to be there as individuals create a new juxtaposition of self, others, and their world through this bi-personal connection.

It is as Aesop says, **“Gratitude turns what we have into enough.”** I felt fulfilled, nourished, and challenged in all these roles.



In 2015 I read about a Professor at Harvard who had the largest number of students in the history of Harvard. Harvard has been around a long time - and I was intrigued about who this was and what were they teaching? It turned out to be Dr. Tal Ben Shahar and he was teaching a course on Happiness at Harvard! Soon after learning about Dr. Tal and the Science of Happiness - I was all in. I studied with Dr. Tal and a diverse and talented team of mentors (Dr. Tal Ben Shahar, Megan McDonough, Megha (Let your Yoga Dance), and Phoebe Atkinson. My path was changed forever, and I made the shift and became certified in positive psychology.

Now I had research and neuroscience to inform my work with incredible veracity and power. I learned about character strengths that teach us what is strong and good in us. I studied the ten most experienced positive emotions. Gratitude is both a character strength (Values in Action- viacharacter.org) and a positive emotion as well as being one of the most researched topics in the field of Positive Psychology.



Gratitude has long been a virtue that is spoken of in families, literature, philosophy, education, spiritual and biblical literature. In the field of Positive Psychology gratitude is front and center. Over these last seven years my understanding of gratitude has deepened - gratitude is not a concept or a thank you - it is the way I see and experience my life, relationships, and the world.

“Thankfulness is the beginning of gratitude. Gratitude is the completion of thankfulness. Thankfulness may consist merely of words. Gratitude is shown in acts.” ~ Henri Frederic Amiel

Positive Psychology is all about understanding what is good and strong in us and teaching people how to flourish and be “at their best.” Positive psychology is a countermovement to a medical, educational, and psychiatric environment that is diagnostically about ‘what is wrong’ in us.

Positive psychology is heavily fueled by new discoveries through neuroscience about how the brain works and learns throughout our lifetime. Positive psychology provided a wealth of concepts, research, and practical experiential tools for people-making at its best. This expanded my experiential playing field with so many colors, modalities, and media. It elevated me and as you can imagine, inspired people to look at themselves three dimensionally and in full color. As an artist this exploded my creativity and choices.

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GRATITUDE



Gratitude is a lens for seeing the world - your world through what is strong and good in us. It's about not taking life, people, or experiences for granted. Living in Gratitude is a choice and a practice of expressing thankfulness for the good in our lives through words and actions. Can you imagine what this feels like and looks like when expressed continuously in your relationships?

Becoming aware and applying powerful strengths like Gratitude, Creativity, and Love took working together to a new transcendent height. Understanding that we grow from our strengths, not from our weaknesses changed what I was mirroring, and helped people see - their strengths and focus on the good in life. This way of doing Art with people brought a luminosity and endless array of color and dimension to our work. Living and working in gratitude has cushioned my life with an appreciation that provides calmness and connection with others.

The art of people making is an incredibly creative process. I can't exactly describe what goes on in my head - it's a unique dance between deep listening, being able to watch and know what my mind is engaged with - and then slowly points of connection emerge. It is an ever-changing Gestalt of taking in what I see, hear, and experience and synthesizing that into something new, a fresh view.



What really makes this exciting is that I am doing this in tandem and connection with the other person or people! It's like working on a magic canvas where strokes of the brush, unexpected colors and images appear along with mine – reworking the original image. Sometimes the canvas is white and open for a long time – eventually though pinpoints of color, or brushstrokes begin to appear as the client unfolds their story. Their stories, images and words begin to configure around each other – some connecting – some distinctly in their own space. This creative process is exactly like art – sometimes it flows easily and at other times the spark cannot be found.

We connect through these experiences, tools, and reflections, always turning the mirror to see what else is there from all sides. We are on this journey together and what gets reflected in the canvas of the mirror keeps changing. The mirror reflects the many beautiful, vulnerable, courageous, hopeful, and loving choices - art forms - that we can all be.

I am grateful for all my teachers, colleagues, and mentors.

