



FEBRUARY

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Edited by KERRY MALONEY

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# MAKING THE CASE

Transforming the Lives of Children Through the Arts

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A publication of  
Variety the Children's Charity of New York

**MAKING THE CASE:**

Transforming the Lives of Children Through the Arts

An essay compendium compiled  
and edited by Kerry Maloney

FEBRUARY 2017

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Variety the Children's Charity of New York supports grassroots non-profit organizations in the Tri-State area whose programs use the arts as a catalyst to transform the lives of under-served children.

## LETTER FROM OUR INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

A Happy, Healthy & Prosperous New Year to you!

I am excited to share Variety the Children's Charity of New York's January 2017 issue of Making the Case: Transforming the Lives of Children Through the Arts. This year's compendium of essays includes four truly unique and inspiring case studies that highlight the importance of transformative arts, and the steps being taken to make a profound impact on behalf of our youth and in our communities.

We hope that the essays included in this publication are illustrative of the vision of these grassroots organizations and the impact they are making with their local youth. This year, the four outstanding pieces include a challenge to the arts education community, accessing dances meanings through embodied imagination which combines dance with written and visual arts, arts for youth involved in the juvenile justice system offering, "Lessons to allow a place of reflection & possible resolution" and a center offering nontraditional therapies to assist children and young adults through trauma and grief. I introduce you to our four spotlight essays:

- Artistic Noise Making the Case  
by Lauren Adelman, Sophia Dawson and Laura Schneider, Artistic Noise
- A Challenge to the Arts Education Community: 3 Recommendations to Help Reduce The Cycle of Poverty  
by Adam Jacobs, Kids Creative
- Accessing Dance's Meanings through Reflective Embodied Imagination  
by Mark B. DeGarmo, Ph.D., B.F.A., Founder, Executive & Artistic Director of Mark DeGarmo Dance
- Sensitivity, Respect, and Creative Therapies  
by Lisa Donohue-Olivieri, Art Therapist, Resiliency Center of Newtown

The work executed and documented by organizations like Kids Creative, Mark DeGarmo Dance, Artistic Noise and The Resiliency Center of Newtown as well as all of Variety New York's grantees proves the immense impact that the arts have on these young minds and in shaping their futures. In addition to the insight from our grantees essays, research from Critical Links, a provider of information technology for use in schools, has identified six benefits associated with the study of the arts for youth: Reading and Language skills, mathematics skills, thinking skills, social skills, motivation to learn and positive school environment. The arts are indeed critical to the futures of our youth. The need for the arts and the hope that it brings is evident in these stories. It is Variety New York's goal, with these essays to inspire, challenge you even, to help make a difference within your community, to get involved.

Together, through the arts, we can make a difference in countless young lives and our communities for "When artists give form to revelation, their art can advance, deepen and potentially transform the consciousness of their community." ~ Alex Grey.

Best regards,

Kerry Maloney  
Interim Executive Director

# artistic noise:

bringing the freedom and power  
of artistic practice to young people  
in the juvenile justice system

**Artistic Noise** is an arts and entrepreneurship program for juvenile justice involved youth. The program provides participants with the opportunity to use the visual arts to process and document their experiences, while also developing valuable life and job skills.

## STOP DOING THEN START AGAIN

by Lauren Adelman, Sophia Dawson and Laura Schneider

The news is just the news until one day it hits close to home. Whether we receive it from the 7 o'clock update, our Facebook newsfeed or while online with a handheld device, we are faced with local and international troubling information on an hour-to-hour basis. We can respond or choose not to by turning off the television, closing a tab or simply scrolling up. But when flashing lights outside of your window reflects breaking news it becomes impossible to ignore.

Certain events are so large, so symbolic, that the population seems to stumble, mid-stride, all together. Such were the events of the fall of 2014, with the shooting of Michael Brown and the death of Eric Garner. Adults often have a platform to act upon. They write articles, attend town halls, call senators, and organize panels. While young people are beginning to use social media, they still do not have ready access to the channels of dialogue, or the public platforms, or even the listeners. When the general public erupted into conversations about violence against Black men within the context of the police and the criminal justice system, we as an organization had to discuss and process these issues with our youth.

Artistic Noise exists to bring the freedom and power of artistic practice to young people who are incarcerated, on probation, or otherwise involved in the justice system. Through visual arts and entrepreneurship programs in Massachusetts and New York, our participants give voice to their experiences, build community through collaborative projects, and learn valuable life and job skills. Artistic Noise creates safe spaces where court-involved youth can be seen, heard and supported on their path to adulthood. We believe the practice of making art offers opportunities for young people and communities to transform. In 2001, Artistic Noise was founded in Boston as collaboration between a juvenile defender, an artist and a young incarcerated woman, under the fiscal sponsorship of the Juvenile Rights Advocacy Project (JRAP) at Boston College Law School. In 2008, we expanded to open Artistic Noise New York and became an independent non-profit. Over the years, Artistic Noise has grown to serve hundreds of children and teens affected by the justice system in both Boston and New York every year. The three co-founders still serve in the leadership of Artistic Noise: Francine T. Sherman is a board member and Director of the Juvenile Rights Advocacy Project at Boston College Law School; Lauren Adelman is the New York Executive Director and a practicing artist; and Minotte Romulus is the Boston Assistant Director, a board member, and a former youth participant.

The young people we work with are often grappling with very adult issues. These issues can be as personal as losing one of the members of our community to police violence that was not written about in the paper, to larger societal issues such as the verdicts and aftermath of the Eric Garner and Michael Brown cases. Some issues are much more joyful, such as Barack Obama's election as the first Black President. Our participants often describe their involvement with Artistic Noise as a type of family. As such, we have a responsibility to help our teens process these often difficult, and sometimes joyous, life events. Many of our young people do not have the tools that can help them cope with the powerful emotions of anger, fear and hope. These are human emotions; every one of us knows their pull. Difficulties arise when there is no channel for these

emotions, and feelings of powerlessness begin to set in. One of our mantras at Artistic Noise is that angry art can quite often be powerful art.

Artistic Noise designs lessons to allow a place of reflection and possible resolution. But what does this look like in response to larger, harder to resolve, societal events? How do we address these issues within the context of a workshop?

### Stop doing, then start again...

We all have experienced the deep, internal shift that marks events of personal importance--a loved one passes, a family member is born, an injury sustained. However the world in which we function often does not afford space for the re-calibration that occurs when orienting towards a changed circumstance. Often the rigidity of systems and responsibilities cannot heed to the rhythm of our human processing, causing an unsettling, and out-of-synch positioning. Artistic Noise strives to create a space of attunement.

When an event permeates social consciousness, our workshops respond by honoring the need to pause, process and adjust. Sometimes the best thing we can do is to stop doing, and then engage with doing again, purposefully. Setting aside current projects to choose how to respond to an event is a way of seizing control. Students have very little control over many aspects of their lives, especially those involved in the court system whose intricacies are difficult to navigate even for adults or those working within them. The un-personalized force of time is perhaps the most difficult element of one's life to exert control over. By stopping and starting again students take control rather than be swept away.

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Breaking away from in-progress projects to create space for contemplation of a significant event should be of the youths' determination. Students will have ideas about what's going on, even if the impulse is to not want to talk about it anymore. A teacher might ask students to elaborate on their frustration. What are they sick of? Or perhaps, what is the opposite, the exact counter point to this issue? The desire to not engage with a difficult subject can be an entry point too, allowing for a different approach. Art practice in workshops does not have to produce objects. Art practice can involve the destruction, erasure, or denial of objects or expectations as well. What follows are examples of how Artistic Noise has handled a variety of different circumstances that have arisen through the years.

### Anecdote: Fall 2014 Ferguson/Eric Garner's Case Teaching Artist Sophia Dawson

On the afternoon of the non-indictment decision of the Eric Garner case, we started our check-in by asking everyone to share his or her thoughts. In Artistic Noise, check-ins are a safe space at the entry and end of each session where students sit in a circle and respond to the same question openly and honestly without judgment. These check-in circles, rooted in our commitment to Restorative Justice, provide a time where everyone gets to be heard and are critical in allowing teachers to assess the group's larger dynamic and needs. During this specific check-in, students were first reluctant to share their thoughts, but one by one they started to open up. The sentiment on the issue revolved around the idea of such news coming as a shock to so many; they could not understand why people were so surprised and so upset. One student stated, "This is what they do to us." They agreed with one another that things like this have been happening to young people of color and they expressed their skepticism about it ever changing.

When everyone had a turn to check in and the conversation kept going, it became clear that we were not

changing the subject anytime soon. Instead of moving on to work on our animation project, I instead asked them to use newspapers with current and past events to pull out images and words that related to what we were talking about. At first no scissors were given to them. We spent time talking and pulling out pages then ripping out what was important from those pages. It allowed the conversation to push forward while giving our hands and eyes something to do.

The conversation shifted to talk about police presence in certain neighborhoods versus in other ones. The fact that gentrification plays a huge role in all of this was brought up as well. They talked about how they felt they are being pushed out of neighborhoods that they grew up in. Some expressed how they feel that one day there will be no people of color living in Harlem, areas in the Bronx, and wondering what that meant for them. It became clear that though they recognize events that happen on a daily basis, they are also concerned and preoccupied with the larger systemic issues they face.

Midway through our ripping I pulled out a large piece of paper and asked them to begin to paste things down or tell me where to paste them so that they could facilitate their individual selections into a collaborative piece. They were then able to refine things with scissors and to add text. Some of the words that were actually spoken were included in the piece. The collage became a demo piece for the next week's session, in which we created an animation of a collage in response to the non-indictment. The processing of the event encouraged our current project to at first be put on hold, and then re-visited as a different type of animation. We took still shots as we worked, pasting things down. We still worked collaboratively but everyone organically found a role in which they felt comfortable. This time we worked in silence with a mutual understanding that everything was being placed down in the right place at the right time.

In order to keep the conversation going, I suggested our next group project focus on figures of authority in general and our interactions with them. We began by visiting the RESPOND exhibition at Smack Mellon, which was an artistic response to recent happenings revolving around police brutality. Although youth were inspired by the show, particularly the different media and approaches each artist took, most of them decided that they did not wish to talk about policing in their individual projects. They felt that they have already had experiences with police, judges, lawyers, caseworkers, etc., and why should they constantly have to talk about these experiences in their work? Instead some of the students wanted to focus on more positive figures of authority in their lives such as career coaches, principals, and teachers to name a few.

### Anecdote: Memorial Mural Teaching Artist, Lauren Adelman

Early on in Artistic Noise's founding in New York City we tragically lost Anthony, one of our most active participants. Days before his 18th birthday he was shot in his neighborhood by the police. At the time Artistic Noise was offering workshops at a GED program for court involved teens. The GED program was run like a traditional high school and the students met every day. The group was very small and the students were all quite close. This was an enormous loss and shock for the community. After his wake and funeral the program approached me and asked if we could paint a memorial mural in honor of Anthony.

It was the classic example of stopping our current project, reflecting and responding. In this instance we needed the art to create a safe space for our youth to express and process their emotions and fears. Anthony had been an active member in our art class and was quite a talented young artist. We created a mural design that was similar to many of the traditional memorial murals found throughout NYC with Anthony's portrait

in the center. The other students then decided to surround him with his drawings inside sketchbooks with large graffiti style wings in the background. It was a powerful process and there were many days where it was too raw and too much for the youth to actually work on the project.

This was an example of how we stopped everything to reflect on this tragedy, but then did not push the response. Forceful engagement with a topic only underscores the sense of disempowerment. In this situation we were dealing with a tragedy that struck really close to home, and brought up many issues in our students' own lives, it was important to allow them the space to reflect, but only on their own terms. For the next few months the mural was always out to be worked on if desired, but other projects were being created in tandem. There were days where all the students worked on the mural and there were days where no one worked on the mural. It was out though, every time we met.

The mural was created on 3 large pieces of wood and was installed in our annual exhibition at NYU's Commons Gallery along with Anthony's artwork. We invited Anthony's family and his mother came with many other family members. It was a powerful evening and ended with the teens giving the mural to Anthony's family to hang in their home.

**Anecdote: Obama's election**  
**Teaching Artist, Lauren Adelman**

Addressing joyous events in the same way we address difficult ones is very important in the work we do with young people. Intense feelings of joy also need to be addressed. For example, after our annual art exhibits we always have a circle for a checkout question and wrap up with our teen curators at the end of the evening. Often times the young people we work with have not had many experiences of intense joy and pride in the positive things that they do. They have not been recognized in this way. It is important that they process this intense joy before they leave and return to their neighborhoods for the same reasons it is important to process the difficult issues.

The morning after Obama's first election was intense for everyone. It almost seemed irrelevant to work on anything, talk about anything, do anything that was not related to the election of the United States' first Black President. This was another instance where we stopped everything. We had to. Students and staff alike were experiencing extreme emotions.

At the time we were running Wednesday workshops at a GED program in Harlem, a detention center in the Bronx and a community center in the South Bronx. There was a large piece of discarded wood in the GED center and we decided that morning to begin a painting in response to the election. The teens traced a photo of Obama from a Shepard Fairy poster on the wood and began to paint. Staff, many who had lived in Harlem their whole lives and never thought they would see a Black man elected president, started to add quotes to the Board, we all joined together and painted. There was no plan, this was purely a response.

I then brought the board to The Bronx Residential Center to work with the young men incarcerated there to continue on this spontaneous piece. The emotions there were different, much more contained. These young people were incarcerated, and even though a Black man was elected President, they were still incarcerated and they felt like this event was not going to change anything about their situation. Yet they added to the painting. I then brought the piece to the Next Generation Center where I taught our advanced youth Art & Entrepreneurship. It was just a coincidence that all of these workshops happened to meet on the day after the election. Perhaps the most profound moment was when one of our advanced participants began

talking about how he had never seen his father cry, and the night before he had, but they were tears of joy. He wrote this quote down on the painting that had traveled from Harlem to detention and then to this vibrant community center in the South Bronx. The painting was finished in a day. It still hangs up in the Next Generation Center the final place where it was worked on. Celebrating joy through art is equally as important as addressing difficult issues.

**Anecdote: Destroyed Drawing**  
**Teaching Artist, Lauren Adelman**

Before the formal founding of Artistic Noise in New York City, I worked as the Art Teacher at a NYC Department of Education High School for formerly incarcerated youth. My work at this school led to the founding of Artistic Noise's NY chapter. My colleague and I were taking a group of young men on a fieldtrip to accept an award and see the screening of a film they had created at The Museum of Television and Radio. I was waiting on line at the subway station window to give the travel voucher to the person working there. As we were waiting at the tiny 28th St 6 train station one of our best students, Sean \*(pseudonym), was playing around swinging on the turnstile joking that he was going to jump it, because it was taking so long. Finally, I got to the window and slid the voucher through the slot, the MTA employee pressed the button to let the kids through the large gate and Sean, having attended tons of fieldtrips with us, pushed the gate open. Immediately 4 policemen came running out of a door saying he had jumped the turnstile. By the time my colleague had taken his metro card out of his pocket and swiped his card, Sean was already in handcuffs against the wall of the subway platform. What transpired from there is all too familiar for our youth. Sean and all of our students trusted us enough that they stayed quiet and did not react to the events that were unfolding. After a very intense 30 minutes Sean was let go. We got on the train as a group in silence. Sean was embarrassed for us to have seen him like this and the feeling of joy and pride that we had upon leaving school had turned to anger and shame. My colleague said to us all, "did you hear what they said? Did you all hear what they said?" None of us had. As we boarded the train one of the officers said, "they're from that school, there's no hope for those kids." The shame increased and my colleague got off at the next stop to return to 28th St and write down the badge numbers of all the officers involved.

At school the next day we processed the situation with the group of students present at the station. Sean wanted to create a drawing about the incident. He created a beautiful and powerful charcoal illustration of the situation as he remembered it. A few months later when we were installing our annual exhibit at the Commons Gallery at NYU, the gallery mentioned that a small wall was going to be demolished after our show and we were welcome to do an installation on it. Sean felt it was the perfect placement for a larger version of his drawing. He projected his original drawing and created a large charcoal mural on this wall. We hung the unanswered letter we sent to the NYPD next to a story of the event on the adjoining wall. Many of the pieces were for sale at this exhibit and Sean was one of our students most interested in selling his work. A visitor to the show fell in love with the site-specific drawing he created and wanted to buy the wall! Sean absolutely refused. He wanted to sit there and watch his piece get demolished, and to allow himself the space to heal from his past involvement in the juvenile justice system and the situation his peers and his teachers had to witness.

## Anecdote: Election Results

### Teaching Artist, Nic Holiber

The day after the election, November 9, 2016, Artistic Noise's Art, Entrepreneurship & Curatorial Program met for what is usually a routine workday. The participants arrive, grab a snack, do a group check-in, and get to work on their projects. However, this day was different for obvious reasons. I remember riding the subway up to Harlem and feeling a weird sensation, like everyone was stuck in a fog. Nobody was looking at each other, the train was silent, and everyone had their head down. I thought, how are our young people going to feel? What will we do today? I was looking forward to forgetting about the election for a few hours to teach art.

The check-in question asked each participant to reflect on the election results. I realized quickly that the magnitude of what had happened the night before did not escape our young people. Everyone wanted to talk about it; they were angry and upset, but not surprised. They said racist America elected this president and it was a side of the nation that they were familiar with. We discussed our role going forward and how we can learn from the Civil Rights Movement of the 50's and 60's to inform our decisions. The youth participants debated about the effectiveness of riots and peaceful protests, we spoke about poverty, fear of war, and trust. If one person became negative, someone else would counter with a positive comment.

Weeks prior to the election at our Harlem studio, our participants all filled out their voter registration forms and sent them off. A friend of Artistic Noise's, a formerly incarcerated man who cannot vote, came to speak to my group before the election. He emphasized how voting is a responsibility, a civic duty, and how people fought and died for them to have this right. He explained that he's unable to vote because of his criminal record and how frustrated that makes him feel. Our kids were voting for themselves but also for this man, they were voting for their community.

Now that the haze has settled, the question our participants are asking themselves is, "what do I do now?". They are all keeping an interest in the actions of our president and we discuss a new political topic at almost every workshop. Some of the participants took part in the Women's March in New York and Washington. Others walked in different protests. At the studio, they make political art or use the projects to stay positive about themselves and this country. As a group, we are doing what we can; writing our senators and voicing our opinions about what matters most.

That evening after the election will always remain vivid in my mind. We didn't make any art that night, we just sat and talked for the entire 3-hour workshop. They weren't students and I wasn't a teacher, we were all just people concerned for each other and our country. I realized what a special place Artistic Noise is for our participants and how important it is in their lives. Also, important for myself and my colleagues, because being with our young people made me feel just a little bit optimistic about the next four years. Challenge and uncertainty is not new to our participants, they have persevered through the most extreme system of oppression and persecution.

## Conclusion

Visual art can turn really ugly experiences into beautiful pieces. To experience this is extraordinarily powerful for both the artists and the viewer. Art asks us to share, reflect and associate. The ability to talk about difficult issues and learn a vocabulary to address these issues is power. We, as artists are always taking the internal and creating something external. What we make and leave behind can speak to something bigger than ourselves.

Artistic Noise participant Angel reflected, “When I came here I didn’t know I would make art like this. I thought it would be just regular things. But I’m making art about racism. There are a lot of crazy things going on in this world. I feel like for me and for other people art can open up your eyes. See true life. I know that racism exists and has for a long time. When I see artists making art about it, and when I make art about it, it’s amazing.”

Angel painted a piece portraying the staircase inside of the Pink Houses where the alleged accidental shooting death of Akai Gurley took place, for Teaching Artist Sophia Dawson’s project on Authority Figures. Angel decided to highlight Akai’s story by recreating a painting of the interior of the Pink Houses bringing viewers to the exact scene where the victim was murdered. It is done in a beautiful style forcing viewers to draw near. When he exhibited his work, a man who had grown up in the Pink Houses saw his piece and was eager to talk with him about it. Through their conversation he learned how the Pink Houses has changed over time and the role of racism within the East New York community in general. Angel said, “It was good and exciting that someone could relate to what I made. I was surprised. I want to make more paintings people can relate to like that.” Like all of these anecdotes, this experience was empowering to Angel because through his art he was able to contribute in a positive way to an issue he cared about.



**Kids Creative** is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that offers arts based, peace education programs for Pre-K to High School age students through after school programs, workshops and summer camps.

## A CHALLENGE TO THE ARTS EDUCATION COMMUNITY:

### 3 Recommendations to Help Reduce The Cycle of Poverty

Adam Jacobs, Kids Creative

*Kids Creative, a New York City arts education nonprofit, is changing our financial model, and we're seeing positive results. After years of fiscal uncertainty as a result of heavy reliance on grant funding, our organization is diversifying our funding streams to include earned income opportunities, such as a tuition-based summer camp, workshops for schools and birthday parties for kids. While we still do grant writing and fundraising, these other income sources allow us more stability in cash flow and security in covering overhead costs, which are sometimes not included in grant funds. However, we're not just expanding our offerings to paying customers as a means of financial survival. We also intentionally target customers from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds to secure economic, racial and social diversity among our clientele in a City where schools are essentially segregated. By focusing on economic growth and mission at the same time, we have actually strengthened our organization's footing and our social impact as a nonprofit.*

Nonprofits are under great pressure to run more like a business. Lucy Morillo, a professional fundraiser, says that "in order to succeed in raising funds as a nonprofit organization, we must think and act like a business." However, at Kids Creative, we change this popular moniker to "Nonprofits that explore income potential like a business can be more sustainable and have the potential to make social change with a greater number of people." With a few changes to the way income potential factors into nonprofit budgets and programs, the phrase "Nonprofits should be run more like a business" takes on a very different meaning.

In this paper, I look at the nonprofit field through the lens of the changes taking place at Kids Creative. I identify three main factors that have lead our organization to a greater social impact while also operating on a more sustainable budget.

The three changes are:

1. Design programs that engage participants from a wider range of income levels;
2. Market tuition-based programs to those who can afford it, while fundraising to enroll those who cannot;
3. Involve community stakeholders to plan long-term programming and secure funding.

The impact:

- More money
- Easier cash flow
- Sustainability
- Social Change

Traditionally, arts education programs, like most nonprofit organizations, target specific communities and cannot rely on a long-term plan because funding in that specific community is not predictable. However, Kids Creative is working with our funders and community stakeholders to provide more stability for the organization, which in turn ensures we will provide more opportunities for their children.

### Why this challenge?

Managing a budget is tricky, especially in a small nonprofit organization. Funds are difficult to secure on a long-term basis and cash flow is unpredictable at best. Unfortunately, many organizations get lost and feel it necessary to chase funds that stretch their mission and resources. The call to diversify funding sources is not new, but sometimes the challenge to secure new funds seems like climbing a mountain. If handled correctly, though, seeking new earned income opportunities allows for groups to take more control of their funding sources. Groups should not chase new funding opportunities and change their programming entirely; on the contrary, organization leadership can actually capitalize on their existing programs and identify ways to bring their unique programs into new earned income markets (i.e., paying for services directly as opposed to through grant funds).

Discovering an earned income component does not solve all financial woes, but developing that market can help if/when other sources run dry. This model developed at Kids Creative saved the organization in 2010 when government grant funding was held up because of the financial downturn. We started Kids Creative in 2000 to provide after school and summer programs where we led kids in the process of writing original musicals. We had discovered a void in the middle-income market in Manhattan and the potential to sell our programs to paying clients. We also found a similar need in the lower-income communities of Manhattan, which were often times only blocks away from each other, with populations that did not have ready access to the arts or the ability to pay for our classes. That drove us to develop a nonprofit business model. We strive to have an even balance of funding streams, charging tuition to those who can afford it, and contract with schools and communities to include those families and schools who cannot. We also focus heavily on fundraising for these programs through government grants and foundation, corporate and individual donors. We are adding staff to focus on these different income streams and work together to develop marketing strategies that appeal to our variety of audiences. We have established fiscal oversight that takes into account all sources of income, particularly grant and donor funds, and any restrictions as a result of those grants.

As organizations explore this new model, each group must identify its own unique marketing edge as well. Early on, we discovered a unique marketing strategy to help appeal to a larger audience. The music we wrote for the plays was unique and had a wider appeal than just the kids in Kids Creative. We wrote music for kids on our own that appealed to a mass audience and formed The Dirty Sock Funtime Band, releasing music to the general public. The band gained popular appeal and eventually national attention with music videos on Nickelodeon. Kids Creative benefited from the band's marketing and profits coming into the nonprofit. While we were able to build and grow with this opportunity, other organizations have also found a similarly unique marketing edge. Our colleagues at border crossers, another small nonprofit, have established themselves as experts in helping elementary school teachers discuss race with their students and now have a steady income stream providing workshops to schools around the country on this topic.

## The Nonprofit Conundrum

There are aspects of the traditional nonprofit model that hinder being able to act exactly like a for-profit business. "I realize that I cannot belong to a nonprofit organization because when you receive grants, you have to make great compromises with your artistic plans," Mikhail Baryshnikov. As Baryshnikov sees it, traditional funding streams are a hindrance, but that only needs to be the case if groups are solely reliant on grant funds. Nonprofit organizations that diversify their funds can actually target more income opportunities than a for-profit business. For example, Baryshnikov's dance troupe could have multiple income sources for one single show: tickets that are open to the general public, block tickets sold to a private school to supplement their cultural enrichment programming, a meet and greet with major donors before the show and a grant from a corporate sponsor to offer tickets to students from a public school that lacks funds to purchase tickets.

It is understandable why Baryshnikov was concerned, though. Traditional nonprofit commerce is conducted in a very convoluted method. A for-profit sells products or services to a customer who pays for those products or services. If the customer no longer wants the product or service, they cease payment and seek services elsewhere. For example, if Starbucks develops a new Frappuccino flavor that is not popular with customers, they will see it in sales and will likely discontinue that drink. While clients pay for some services in the nonprofit system, often the services are provided free or at low cost and paid for by an unrelated donor. Even if the program is highly in demand and coveted by community members, they cannot decide if the services continue because they do not have the funds to afford the service. In direct contrast to for-profits, demand does not always lead to supply.

Oftentimes funders will end a grant with no regard for how the services will continue after funding ends, sometimes leaving a major void for the community in a space where there once was a great program. This approach creates dependence on externally controlled funds, and in some ways actually perpetuates poverty in the community, something many programs are established to help alleviate. Imagine being told that you only have access to one service, even if it is mediocre, and then not knowing if that service will continue because of factors outside of your control. This funding system creates a divide between the haves and the have-less. Kids Creative struggled with this in 2013, when a major New York State Education Department grant for an elementary school in East Harlem reached the end of its term and was not renewed. The program was publicly funded, showed positive metric results, and was very popular in the school. Despite its popularity among families and kids, funding was not renewed, with little regard to pleas from parents to continue the program. Kids Creative was able to identify private funding for the next two years and continue to enroll students in other opportunities, but there has been uncertainty each year as to what program we can provide at the school. As of the writing of this article, we have not secured funding, leaving the families with no after school program in the building.

Had Kids Creative established our earned income strategies earlier for that school, it is possible that we could have secured external funds prior to the close of the grant and we may have had more control over its destiny.

It is essential for nonprofits to consider how income is incorporated in future strategic planning and in consideration of clients and meaningful social change. Businesses that are profit-driven must be proactive, explore income incentives and empower the business owner to drive sales, all things that will help a nonprofit not only survive but also thrive.

## Recommendation 1: Expand Offerings

Arts education programs offer countless benefits to participants and appeal to a wide range of audiences. Teaching painting, theater, and music in schools boosts confidence, builds community and even teaches conflict resolution. The arts also offer teachers resources to increase students' understanding of academic subjects, particularly students with different learning needs. There are universal benefits that help children from all communities. The arts have universal appeal because they encourage self-exploration, communication and other life skills that are essential as we progress through life.

Kids Creative first ran two summer camps on the Upper West Side, 15 blocks away from each other. One camp was for tuition-paying families, while the other was sponsored by the local City Council member and a foundation grant and enrolled students for free. This way of operating was contradictory to our goal of bringing together children from diverse backgrounds, so we developed a camp for all of these kids, with sliding scale tuition that had a few different funding streams.

In order to redefine community, we had to explore the impact of income inequality on NYC neighborhoods as well as on the overall NYC community. In New York City, different populations live blocks away from each other and rarely interact, especially in educational settings. The income differential in Manhattan is staggering: "The top 5 percent of households earned \$864,394, or 88 times as much as the poorest 20 percent, according to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey". Statistics between schools are particularly striking. At PS 102 in East Harlem, 99% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch, indicating high levels of poverty, and Hispanic and African-American students comprise 97% of the school population. Kids Creative has run grant funded after school programs at PS 102 since 2008. In comparison, PS 77, located just 17 blocks south of PS 102 at East 96th Street and 3rd Avenue, has 72% White students and only 12% Black and Latino students. Not coincidentally, PS 77 houses PTA funded after school classes. With only 8% of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, their families are able to afford outside extracurricular activities and do not suffer from many of the pitfalls that are characteristic of living in poverty, the main one being limited access to resources. Furthermore, it seems that students are becoming even more isolated: "The typical black student attended school with 29% white students in 1970 and 23% in 1980. By 2010, that number had declined to 17%. Similarly, Latinos' exposure to white students declined from 22% in 1989 to 20% in 2010."

A key element of the Kids Creative summer camp is to compete with other performing arts camps that appeal to wealthier audiences. The difference between Kids Creative and other camps is that we intentionally enroll a mix of campers and tuition only accounts for 50% of our income. We apply for grants to cover the remaining 50% of campers who receive full or near full scholarships. The curriculum is to write original musicals together in a well-structured, safe, supportive environment. The result is that children interact with one another through their imaginations and eventually have conversations about their lives. One parent whose daughter is on scholarship to attend the Kids Creative Summer Camp said, "Thank you for creating a space where my daughter can grow and have fun, and not just be a face in the crowd but be part of a loving community." The mother of two young campers, whose family pays tuition to attend camp, commented, "Our family has been looking for a place like this, where our children can be themselves and interact with kids who they wouldn't meet otherwise." Parents are looking for a space where their children can belong, no matter what their income level is, and we believe it is our duty to offer a space for everyone.

While there is no magic way to bridge the divide between communities in New York City, arts education groups have the opportunity to facilitate more interactions between individuals. The arts offer the

opportunity to share personal and communal stories with those from different backgrounds. The arts have a universal appeal and can serve as a stepping stone to mutual learning opportunities.

### Recommendation 2: Market to New Communities

In order to appeal to a wider audience, arts organizations should market their earned income opportunities to help cover expenses. Each organization can identify products that are already part of their portfolio that would be appealing to a paying audience. It is challenging to break into a paying market, but it should be considered an investment in the future of the organization. At Kids Creative, we consider 10 students paying tuition to our summer camp a similar victory to receiving a large grant, and potentially more sustainable if the students return year after year. Earned income can be secured in any number of forms—charging tuition to students from households that can afford it, ticket sales to final performances or selling a final product, and even securing extra funds for providing arts workshops for schools, companies and other organizations. The challenge is to develop marketing for these earned income strategies to reach a wider variety of clients. If successful, groups will bring people together from different backgrounds and have the power to seek out longer-term funds

At Kids Creative, we are continuously developing our earned income avenues. An example of this is Kids Creative themed parties. We offer private Kids Creative parties at a cost, which varies depending on the age of the participants, the size of the group, the activities chosen and more. We offer parents a choice of Kids Creative experiences for their child's birthday celebration. Not only are we opening different streams of income, we can also marketing Kids Creative in a private setting. When kids have fun at the parties, their parents are more likely to consider paying for summer camp.

Non-Profit organizations that develop earned income opportunities that are in line with their mission may even find it easier to market the programs because they can speak as “experts” on the products.

### Recommendation 3: Funders, Community Leaders, and Organizations Should Work Together to Ensure Sustainability

Quality arts programs cost money. Cities are home to amazingly talented actors, musicians, visual artists and more. Talented teaching artists help an organization stay competitive in a tuition-paying market, but this comes at a cost. In addition to the teachers, program administration, structure, and evaluation also require organizational resources. In order to ensure a quality program with longevity, it is essential to plan future funding opportunities. Unfortunately, grant funding is unpredictable. Often, grants are given year to year and evolve as grant priorities change for the funders. The job of a foundation program officer is not easy: they have identified many areas of need and have to focus on a variety of different groups, all of whom are doing great work and presenting a great cause. With limited funds available, deciding which groups are funded is a very challenging task. However, foundations and government agencies MUST consider funding on a long-term scale. Losing programs with little or no forewarning can actually be harmful to students since school administrators cannot plan ahead to integrate programs into their curricula and, in the case of after-school and summer programs, families may be left without childcare. Community leaders must work with funders and organizations on a long-term plan. Funders can instead be partners with organizations to compliment earned income streams because they can often provide large amounts of funding for multiple years, and can help devise plans that help groups sustain programs after the end of the grant period.

One helpful strategy is a sunset period that allows other funders to get on board and familiar with the project before the grant ends. A sunset period is a period in which the non-profit gets notice of the funding

reduction so that they can search for other funding Community leaders can also develop relationships with funders that are interested in their community so that, if the event of a funding reduction, they have other resources they for the nonprofit. Variety the Children's Charity of New York, one of Kids Creative's funders, currently offers this type of funding and is working with our staff to connect to other funding opportunities and plan for the end of the grant period. Through planning, funders have the ability to share resources and support arts education long term.

One rule that we recommend funders change is that some grants do not allow any participants to pay tuition, meaning that a sliding scale tuition model is not in line with those rules. Unfortunately, this means that there is even less sustainability for the program. As part of the planning process, government officials should encourage agencies to allow for tuition to be charged to those who are able to afford it. This enables the program to still keep at least part of the program running in the event of the loss of a grant.

Community leaders need to be invested in the future of all programs serving their children. Arts education programs not only provide personal enrichment opportunities for children, it has also been proven to help resolve conflicts between kids, as they learn to express themselves in more productive ways when a conflict arises. Community leaders needs to identify these benefits and educate their corporate partners

## Conclusion

"Non-Profits should be run more like businesses" is a phrase that most non-profit organizations hear over and over in light of their need for sustainability, and by expanding to include earned income opportunities, sustainability is possible. It is essential that nonprofits are at the forefront of the conversation about utilizing programming that helps bridge economic and racial divides, especially in light of the social climate in the US and the world. Now is the chance to make real, sustainable change. Nonprofits offer immense value to the communities we serve. Particularly in arts education, they have the ability to make both their budgets and their effect more long lasting. The model can be changed to make "business-like" decisions and connect people who would otherwise not be connected through art, music, and theater for the benefit of all involved.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 <http://www.businessinsider.com/new-york-education-is-facing-a-segregation-crisis-2015-1>
- 2 <http://www.nonprofitpro.com/post/why-nonprofits-should-run-like-businesses/>
- 3 "Dancing Free:Two decades after his great leap westward, Mikhail Baryshnikov is still footloose." ByJack Bettridge. Cigar Officionado,Nov/Dec 1997.
- 4 "Gap Between Manhattan's Rich and Poor Is Greatest in U.S., Census Finds". SAM ROBERTS. The New York Times, SEPT. 17, 2014.  
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# MARK DeGARMO Dance

**Mark DeGarmo Dance** is a not-for-profit organization committed to education and the arts, intercultural inquiry, and creativity. They achieve their mission by education underserved NYC communities, and especially children, about the roles of dance and the arts in society; promoting intercultural inquiry and communication; and creating, performing and disseminating original dances and artistic and scholarly work.

## ACCESSING DANCE'S MEANINGS THROUGH REFLECTIVE EMBODIED IMAGINATION:

by Mark B. DeGarmo, Ph.D., B.F.A

Founder, Executive & Artistic Director

### Abstract

Accessing Embodied Imagination is a learning theory positing that dance learners must reflect after improvising freely in a spatial orientation connected to humans' evolutionary creativity and kinesthetic thinking distinct from thinking in visual images in order to demonstrate Embodied Imagination. Experiences flow continually. How we understand them is related to our reflective practices leading to meaning-making. While creativity and creative process are often ascribed in Western culture to certain fields, such as The Arts, movement improvisation is an evolutionary adaptation that when practiced by in unstructured, upright bipedal binary paleoanthropological space, contributed to the human brain's development. Reflection and reflective practice on improvisational movement experiences can occur across modalities, such as, discussion and writing, graphic and visual arts, sound and music.

Mark DeGarmo Dance's program design includes rigorous journal writing combining written and visual arts entries after each of our dance program's 16 lessons in a basic program of study. However, despite a long-term commitment to this pedagogical sequence and process, we discovered in our own data analysis that our students were surprisingly unable to define an array of basic dance vocabulary after seven years of PreK-5 dance learning in four Title One schools. We used this data to investigate our teaching methods and our classroom teacher-partners' use of a creative writing process with their students as part of our program design. We discovered that in order to increase our students' knowledge, understanding, and ability to apply dance vocabulary in dance and across other fields and areas of their learning, we needed our program design implemented and our teaching artist faculty committed to teaching common vocabulary we consider fundamental to an elementary dance education. We applied the lessons we learned in our 120-hour professional learning program last year and found improvements in students' written use and understanding of dance words and their meanings.

### Overview and History

Mark DeGarmo Dance, founded in 1987 as Dynamic Forms, Inc., is a charity dedicated to education, performance, and intercultural community. MDD's education programs emerged from Mark DeGarmo's transdisciplinary educational scholarship; transcultural transdisciplinary artistic achievements as dancer/performer, choreographer/writer, and director/educator; and lifelong commitment to positive social action, change and human rights, including those of women, children, artists, social dissenters, witnesses, journalists, and critics (Brown; DeGarmo, Diss. & Practicing; Mark DeGarmo Dance website; Surana; United Nations).

Mark DeGarmo Dance's education programs exist in part as a social justice response to extreme systemic educational inequality and inequity, as evidenced across the USA and New York State and particularly in the New York City Department of Education. In addition to having the most segregated State school system in the USA and the largest and third most segregated City public education system in the country, New York is home to a historically and internationally significant professional arts and culture community

(Fessenden; Kucsera). Despite the City's exemplary human and cultural capital, in a secret widely known in the arts-education field for years, the New York City Department of Education has been historically out-of-compliance without consequence with New York State education legislation mandating minimum hours of arts education teaching and learning in elementary schools (Office).

Mark DeGarmo Dance currently raises 99% of the funding for its New York City Department of Education Title 1 PreK-5 public school partners on the Lower East Side, Manhattan and Far Rockaway, Queens. The result is an annual contribution of nearly \$1 million total in unreimbursed cash and in-kind goods and services to the City of New York and the New York City Department of Education. In order to meet the demands for, and resulting challenges of, increased student services, Mark DeGarmo Dance has steadily and incrementally built infrastructural capacity to a current 14 W2 employees, three fulltime (Founder, Executive & Artistic Director; Executive Assistant; and Marketing Associate), five teaching artists, and two dancer/performers. Since 2001, Mark DeGarmo Dance has increased its home base to 1,500 square feet of rented office and studio space on two floors at Manhattan's Lower East Side Clemente Soto Velez Cultural and Educational Center (The Clemente). Support and commendations over Mark DeGarmo dance's 29-year history as a not-for-profit organization include USA, New York State and City elected officials; celebrities; and arts, culture and education funders and organizations. National Endowment for the Arts peer panelists have over several recent years termed our PreK-5 dance education program "a national model."

Mark DeGarmo Dance's current business plan outlines strategies for sustaining and expanding funding for its annual education services beyond its current 1,500 under-served at-risk PreK-5 school-day students. Major funders include a mix of private and public philanthropy providing 97% contributed versus 3% earned income. The DeGarmo team is developing new earned income strategies and programs to build on the success of its educational program.

### Context and Challenges

MDD has maintained City of New York vendor contracts since 1988 to deliver dance education, professional development, and family engagement services in NYC Department of Education schools. MDD is exemplary for a research-based educational program design combining dance grounded in interdisciplinary content-integration and evidence-based process journal writing, including visual arts entries.

Despite Mark DeGarmo Dance's current public school partnerships marking their 14th anniversaries in 2016 and 28 years working in the New York City Department of Education's system, school leaders routinely cite lack of any funding as the reason why they have usually contributed nothing or at most \$1,000-\$5,000 toward \$50,000-\$100,000 worth of the contracted services annually donated to their elementary schools. These are the same schools, but not the same principals, chancellors, elected officials, funders or board members with whom Mark DeGarmo Dance has worked since 2002. At one school, Dr. DeGarmo has worked with four principals, at another school three principals, and at three schools two principals. Almost 100% of the organization's students and families live under the USA poverty rate. Nearly 100% are Latino/Hispanic and Black/African-American. One quarter of students are special education-designated with Individualized Education Programs. In two of Mark DeGarmo Dance's five partnership schools, 50% of PreK-5 students are homeless and living in foster care, the highest percentage of any NYC elementary school.

Parents are unable to provide the level of personal funding and fund-raising expertise parents at wealthier NYC DOE public schools can provide, as is well documented. Some schools have no certified arts teachers on faculties. Preparing for the high-stakes standardized tests sometimes dominate year-long strategies for improving teachers' effectiveness and delivering a holistic elementary education. Another result of the

yearlong focus on testing at one school with a new principal is reducing use of dance arts, which a three-year multi-methods study showed improved our students' math scores, writing, and behavior as compared with control groups. These are some challenges facing our educational intervention's partnership model and program design.

Jane Bonbright, Karen Bradley, and Shannon Dooling's research published by National Dance Education Organization shows that the comprehensive multi-year self-funded and self-sustained dance program that we provide as an outside organization is representative of only what 1-4% of USA elementary schools can boast. And only 7% of USA elementary schools have even one lesson of dance in the annual elementary school-day curricula despite children's rapid physical cognitive body/brain development during these ages.

This uniqueness of our work challenges the understanding and effectiveness of NYC DOE leaders, educators and administrators without personally deep, rigorous or meaningful arts and dance experiences or formal arts education, even in teacher training programs. Additionally, the noncommercial arts are often misunderstood and disparaged in USA public opinion, while spectacle overtakes unique artistic expressivity as the primary criteria of success in the commercial and televised arts and dance arenas (Vargas Llosa). MDD considers these challenges as opportunities for new program development, such as, our higher education initiative; and the Johns Hopkins University's 2016 pilot mixed-methods program evaluation studying the academic and cognitive effects of Mark DeGarmo Dance's "non-cognitive" intervention.

### **MDD's Research-Based Education Intervention: Theory Developed from Practice**

Accessing Embodied Imagination is a learning theory emerging from practice positing that dance learners must reflect after improvising freely in a spatial orientation connected to humans' evolutionary creativity and kinesthetic thinking distinct from thinking in visual images in order to demonstrate Embodied Imagination (DeGarmo, Diss.). Experiences flow continually. How we understand them is related to our reflective practices leading to meaning-making. While creativity and creative process are often ascribed in Western culture to certain fields, such as The Arts, movement improvisation is an evolutionary adaptation that when practiced by hominids in unstructured, upright bipedal binary paleoanthropological space, contributed to the human brain's development. Reflection and reflective practice on improvisational movement experiences can occur across modalities, such as, discussion and writing, graphic design and visual arts, sound and music.

Mark DeGarmo Dance's basic PreK-5 in-school partnership program design includes 16 45-minute dance lessons facilitated by our vetted and trained teaching artists followed by reflective dance journal writing combining written and visual arts entries facilitated by classroom teachers back in their classrooms as part of or for another 45-minute literacy lesson. The goal is to cultivate a collaborative teaching and learning dynamic modeled by a certified elementary educator and a teaching artist. Themes for the dance curricula are grounded in the elementary curricula, thereby developing an interdisciplinary dynamic whereby experts in two or more domains (i.e., Dance and English Language Arts, Social Studies or Math) lead different parts of an extended two-part lesson (Dance in one teaching and learning space followed by rigorous, sustained reflective practice in another teaching and learning space). Goals of the model include: 1) embedding dance arts in the public elementary school via 2) classroom teachers' enhanced understanding of the 3) impact of dance arts on their students knowing, understanding, and doing by 4) engaging students and teachers through 5) excellent to outstanding teaching artist practice. Other goals are to help students move toward greater self-directed learning and self-regulated behavior thereby increasing on-task behaviors, time management, and self-awareness. Learning to learn is an overarching objective with implications across subjects, fields, and domains.

### **Our Assessment and Reflective Self Evaluation Practices**

We have been rigorously assessing and evaluating our PreK-5 teaching and learning practices and outcomes since our Center for Arts Education partnership grant 2002-05 and leadership grant 2005-07 which required such inquiry. We have continued and refined this work for 14 years. Our investigations took many shapes, including a three-year mixed methods study conducted by NYU Sociology professor Dr. Susan Cavin and over 100 of her graduate and undergraduate students (Cavin, Levy, Pyle, DeGarmo, and Mitchell). It found that against the control group without the benefit of our educational intervention, MDD students' standardized math scores, writing, and classroom behavior improved.

We developed multiple methods and instruments, including rubrics triangulated to capture multiple perspectives while measuring the social, emotional, academic, and dance outcomes our school-based and MDD team observed with general, special, and mixed education populations. Many of our students entered school with evidence of trauma from communal and other violence, physical, emotional, and learning disabilities. Therefore, a holistic child-centered assessment and evaluation approach was deemed most likely by our multidisciplinary team of practitioners to present a multi-dimensional portrait of the impact on our students.

Toward this objective, Mark DeGarmo also developed qualitative nonverbal kinesthetic dance assessments, as part of his doctoral research; as well as questionnaires, interviews, and pre-program and post-program vocabulary surveys. DeGarmo adapted the vocabulary surveys for younger and older elementary, special and general education students. In 2013-14 our analysis of the vocabulary surveys revealed some critical evidence with implications that improvements in our teaching and teaching artist-training and pedagogical practices might need review and improvement.

Despite a long-term commitment to a pedagogical sequence of movement followed by rigorous reflection and reflective practice, we discovered in our own data analysis that our students were surprisingly unable to define an array of basic dance vocabulary after up to seven years of PreK-5 dance learning possible in two of our four Title One partnership schools and across a sampling of 32 classrooms.

The surveys included defining 10 dance vocabulary words (students were also invited to use visual or graphic arts to represent their definitions, as developmentally appropriate) without repeating the word to be defined: dance, warm-up, personal space, elements of dance, levels in space, pattern, improvisation, choreography, travelling, and cool-down.

A pattern emerged that students' abilities to define words dramatically increased in the post-program survey compared with the pre-program survey. There was up to a 72% increase in results from the pre-program to the post-program survey. Only one of 32 PreK-5 classrooms showed a decrease in survey results (-9.38%). That grade four classroom had one third of students scoring 100% (4 of 12) taking pre-program survey; only 10% (one of 10) students taking post-program survey scored 100% (up from 88% in the pre-program survey). The overall results across four schools provided a positive indicator that learning seemed to occur as a result of our program, it also suggested that students were not retaining the dance vocabulary from year to year. Another disturbing pattern emerged for words that students could not define. These included basic concepts and vocabulary in elementary dance education: improvisation, choreography, elements of dance, and levels in space.

We used this data to investigate our teaching methods and our classroom teacher-partners' use of a rigorous creative writing process with their students as part of our program design. In 2014-15, DeGarmo hired an education director and dance content specialist to supervise our teaching artists' Professional Learning Program (PLP) for which they are paid and to mentor and coach them in best dance teaching practices. The overall PLP goal is "continual improvement of teaching practice." The 120-hour PLP design included

a renewed emphasis on increasing students' correct use and understanding of dance vocabulary. Survey results the following year showed improvements in students' correct use and understanding of dance vocabulary, as demonstrated by an analysis of their dance journals compared with the 2013-14 dance journal writing analysis. We are curious to see if our 2015-16 dance journal writing analysis reveals a continuation of this positive trend.

### Conclusion and Next Evaluative Steps

We applied the lessons we learned in our vocabulary survey analysis 2013-14 and extended our investigation to a comparative analysis of students' dance writing journals in 2013-14 and 2014-15. We applied the critical lessons we learned that students did not understand and correctly apply basic elementary dance vocabulary. We hired a dance and PreK-5 dance education content specialist to supervise our 120-hour Professional Learning Program starting in 2014-15 and found improvements in students' written use and understanding of dance words and their meanings in their 2014-15 dance journals. We inferred that in order to increase our students' knowledge, understanding, and ability to apply dance vocabulary in dance and across other fields and areas of their learning, we needed our program design implemented by classroom teachers committed to facilitating students' dance journal writing and our teaching artist faculty committed to correctly defining and then teaching common vocabulary we consider fundamental to an elementary dance education. Our Johns Hopkins University School of Education's mixed-methods evaluation 2015-16 will include an analysis of the fidelity with which classroom teachers know and implement our program design. In 2015-16, we will investigate the results of this year's Professional Learning Program as viewed through the lens of a comparative analysis of three years of PreK-5 students' dance journal writing.

We are hopeful that one result of our organizational culture of rigorous assessment and evaluation will include supporting the use of Dance Arts as a low-cost PreK-5 educational intervention in USA elementary schools. For students, such as ours, who are at-risk, under-served, and nearly 100% of whom live under the USA poverty rate, we hope that this work can support use of Dance Arts for the advancement of greater social equity and equality. Dance education is after all an educational intervention that is engaging, fun, and a primary means through which PreK-5 learners come to know and understand themselves, others, and the world around us. We need to ensure that no child is left behind as we continue to seek engaged citizens in our democracy that continues to be a work-in-process and not a done deal.

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The Resiliency Center of Newtown offers trauma-Informed services focused on long-term individual and community healing for children and adults impacted by the tragedy at Sandy Hook School on December 14, 2012.

## SENSITIVITY, RESPECT, AND CREATIVE THERAPIES.

by Lisa Donohue-Olivieri  
Art Therapist, Resiliency Center of Newton

The Resiliency Center of Newtown (RCN) was established in September 2013 to provide long-term healing to the Newtown community following the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. RCN intends to remain a vital resource for the community until the children who were in first grade at the time complete high school and enter college and the workforce. At the requests of members of the community, RCN began offering non-traditional therapies as Art and Music Therapy in September of 2013. These continue to be provided along with Play Therapy, Brainspotting, MNRI (Masgutova Neurosensorimotor Reflex Integration), a summer camp, and other healing experiences. RCN distinguishes itself from other nearby treatment centers by specifically offering these non-traditional therapies that assist people in moving through trauma and grief.

A notable lesson learned early on has been related to the importance of RCN being protective of and sensitive to the Newtown community. With a population of roughly 27,000 people and an intense media coverage lasting several weeks after the event, the small town community found itself in the spotlight. Over 400 children were enrolled in Sandy Hook Elementary on December 14, 2012, and approximately 4000 more were enrolled in the wider Newtown school system. Among them, many had multiple connections through local organizations and activities with the children and educators who lost their lives that day. Furthermore, all eight public and private schools went into a lockdown that day. RCN therapists have recognized that both physical and emotional proximity has played a role in people's experiences of grief and trauma resulting from this event and that this grief and trauma has rippled outward touching nearly everyone in the small town and many people beyond. Psychologists who have researched the ethics involved in providing therapy in a small community have identified the importance of sensitivity to avoid breaches of confidentiality and overlapping relationships. The therapists at RCN seek to provide clients of all ages with a secure space to safely express themselves utilizing the creative process under psychotherapeutic principles.

This paper aims to expand on the importance of sensitivity in the face of myriad issues related to providing appropriate trauma-informed therapy, maintaining confidentiality in a small town, and doing so in a community that has become synonymous with tragedy. Neither Newtown, Connecticut nor its smaller village of Sandy Hook, were communities well-known beyond their Fairfield County neighbors. Shortly after the shooting, that all changed. News vans, sympathy cards, letters, church groups, makeshift memorials, and stuffed animals from all around the world flooded into the community. To date, there is no manual or set of guidelines telling mental health professionals, parents, teachers, the news media, community members, or others watching events unfold on television what to do next.

### Research regarding trauma symptoms following mass shootings

Without such a manual or set of guidelines, how should mental health practitioners respond in the aftermath of a mass shooting? What impact should individuals and community leaders expect to witness and experience in the weeks, months, and years to follow? Although mental health practitioners frequently

work with individuals who have experienced trauma, these individuals generally live in communities and sometimes families that are mentally intact and are able to provide a degree of normalcy that is helpful in recovery.

What has been studied, is the likelihood of developing PTSD following a mass shooting. Fran Norris, Ph.D. with the National Center for PTSD and Dartmouth Medical School, examined the impact on survivors of fifteen mass shooting events (Norris, 2007). Norris (2007) found that diagnoses of post-traumatic stress disorder occurred in 10% to 36% of individuals who directly experienced or witnessed a mass shooting. Additionally, according to her research, the numbers of people reporting “subthreshold PTSD”, those experiencing some symptoms, but not enough to fit the criteria for diagnosis, was much higher, and those reporting no symptoms whatsoever, was very low (Norris, 2007). The article did not address factors such as ages of survivors or the possibility of late-onset PTSD, which is not uncommon. In a 2012 article regarding school shootings and PTSD, Kelly Kearsley interviewed Dr. Melissa Brymer, director of terrorism and disaster programs at the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. Dr. Brymer reported that a certain amount of anxiety, stress and poor sleep is normal following such an event (Kearsley, 2012). According to Kearsley’s interview with Dr. Brymer (2012), those directly exposed are more at risk for PTSD as well as children with histories of mental health problems or other traumas, girls, and younger teens.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 5), PTSD occurs when an individual is exposed to a traumatic event (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Exposure can occur either in physical proximity as a direct witness or by emotional proximity by learning that a close family member or friend experienced the event (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The DSM 5 outlines four distinct clusters of symptoms described as re-experiencing, avoidance, negative cognitions and mood, and arousal (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Re-experiencing is described as spontaneous memories, dreams, or flashbacks of the event (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Avoidance refers to an individual regularly attempting to avoid distressing memories, thoughts, feelings or external reminders of the event (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Negative cognitions and mood refers to a variety of feelings such as a persistent and distorted sense of blame of self or others, estrangement from others, or a noticeable decrease in interest in activities, and an inability to remember key aspects of the event (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Finally, arousal, as described in the DSM 5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), is marked by aggressive, reckless or self-destructive behavior, sleep disturbances, hypervigilance or related problems.

In terms of specific individuals, Susan Donaldson James (2009) reported on the experiences of three of the survivors of the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado ten years after the event. One of the survivors in James’s 2009 article, a chemistry teacher, reported that following the event he would often become physically ill to the point of vomiting and that he still currently experiences crying jags and disrupted sleep when he places the event at the forefront of his mind. Another survivor, a student who was shot and paralyzed, reported that hearing a car backfire, the sound of fireworks, and the smell of nail polish are cues for flashbacks (James, 2009). She explained that when she was in the hospital after the event, her liver was glued back together resulting in the sensitivity to the smell of nail polish. James (2009) reported that this student’s mother committed suicide 18 months after the massacre. Although no additional information is reported, there is a possibility that the mother, as someone with significant emotional proximity, may have also experienced PTSD. Here in Newtown, physical and emotional proximity to the shooting appear to play a role in a person’s likelihood of developing PTSD.

### Impact of media coverage

Like nearly every other community that has experienced a disaster, Newtown and the Village of Sandy Hook also had the experience of hosting dozens upon dozens of television news reporters. Many Newtown and Sandy Hook community members have expressed mixed feelings including resentment and disgust regarding the news media's apparent lack of sensitivity to the impact of the event on the children and families. In an article acknowledging the feeling of media intrusion, Applebome and Stetler (2012) reported: "So, for now, the most intimate and heartbreaking of catastrophes and the insatiable, unwieldy beast of global news media are locked in an awkward union in a bucolic New England town that never expected to encounter either". This sentiment was further acknowledged and explored in 2014 in a Huffington Post live broadcast with Alyona Minkovski. Within the segment, Meg Moritz, Ph.D., a professor of journalism, spoke about the media's response (Minkovski, 2014). She stated, "Commercial news broadcasters need and want big audiences. When there is a crisis or trauma, like we're talking about today, the ratings spike for 12 hours, 24 hours, maybe 48. Commercial broadcasters know this and take advantage of the tune-ins. They go with one story exclusively. They'll stretch out the reporting" (Minkovski, 2014). Sandy Hook parents who have utilized services at RCN have referred to news reporters as "vultures" and reported gratitude for the eventual media retreat. However, concerns regarding media intrusion remain. Just like the Columbine school shooting continues to be reported on, Sandy Hook parents anticipate future 12/14 news pieces. One stated, "I cringe whenever I hear 12/14 or Sandy Hook on the news" adding that reporters often mention the 12/14 event when making comparisons to other shooting tragedies.

### How to respond with a community after a disaster

How does an agency partner with a largely traumatized community that may be cautious or adverse to perceived intrusion? According to Norris (2007), "Mental health planners should proceed carefully, however, as the ubiquity of counseling offers in the immediate aftermath of these events was often resented. Local involvement and control are paramount." Newtown certainly experienced "the ubiquity of counseling offers" that Norris (2007) mentioned. Additionally, Newtown also experienced a ubiquity of creative arts offerings ranging from credentialed and experienced Creative Arts Therapists to painting groups, drumming circles and other non-trauma informed creative experiences. Do community members welcome and trust the offerings? Or are the offerings perceived as intrusive and possibly as exploitative? Norris (2007) asked whether or not should "outside disaster specialists or local mental health workers unfamiliar with disaster work be relied on in crises like these?" Likewise, Newtown has wrangled with the question of choosing professionals with high levels expertise or with sensitive, qualified locals with awareness of local resources.

### Seeking mental health treatment in a small town: Confidentiality and stigma

"I can neither confirm nor deny" is a phrase regularly used by mental health practitioners when asked about personal therapy material in order to maintain the confidentiality of their clientele. Although few people would question anyone impacted by a traumatic event such as a school shooting seeking mental health treatment, the stigma of seeking this kind of service remains. Sadly this stigma is sometimes a barrier that prevents people from seeking the help they need. When asked about the importance of confidentiality, parents of children enrolled in Sandy Hook Elementary on the day of the shooting reported that initially, confidentiality was very important, especially among their children who were worried about people knowing they were in therapy. Parents stated, however, that as more and more of them were "therapist shopping" after the event, confidentiality and stigma became less worrisome and parents became more open to sharing information about therapists as well as comparing notes about children's behaviors.

Regarding RCN's handling of confidentiality, Sandy Hook parents have had favorable responses, including, "I appreciate all the wonderful folks at RCN and for all the hard work the entire team has been doing these

past few years. RCN is a warm, welcoming place for families to come and seek support” and “You guys did a great job”. One did point out a shortcoming of the office design, “Unfortunately I am not sure that RCN’s space lends itself to much more confidentially. There is one door, multiple therapists and clients coming and going all at the same time”. Nevertheless, this parent also stated, “I personally don’t mind when other clients see my family or me frequenting RCN. Again, the therapy barriers have been broken down. When I run into folks at RCN, I am thankful that they too are seeking services and getting support for their family. There is no embarrassment or shame on my part at all. I have to believe that others feel the same”. The Resiliency Center of Newtown was opened to provide trauma-informed services to community members following a horrific tragedy. As others have reported, the effects of PTSD following a shooting may linger for years to come and the lesson about being protective and sensitive to the community may prove to be an ongoing one. Likewise, other lessons may arise. Hopefully, RCN will be prepared to address them in a way that best reflects the community’s needs.

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