

PSYCH OUT

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The Newsletter of the East Side Institute
for Group and Short Term Psychotherapy
www.eastsideinstitute.org

MAKING PLAYS, ALL OVER THE WORLD

In one of the teaching dialogues captured in *Psychological Investigations: A Clinician's Guide to Social Therapy*, social therapy's creator Fred Newman shares how important he thinks performance is to mental health: "That's my hope at least—people all over this country and all over the world making plays. That's my own personal dream of what psychology turns into."

From what I've experienced this spring and summer, Fred's hope might not be just a dream. Traveling from one US or Canadian city to another, I've met hundreds of people from the world over who are doing just that—making plays with people. Some identify as community theatre or drama education professionals. Others do community development or sustainable community work. Still others work as counselors, social workers or therapists. And some are researchers, trying to make sense of all this playmaking.

Why would making plays be good for your mental health?



Marcia Braundy and Lois Holzman at the University of British Columbia.



Lois, Randy Wilson and Joyce Dattner at the West Coast Center for Social Therapy in San Francisco.

Well, if you asked the participants in Ottawa this past July at the International Drama in Education Congress (IDEA 2004) or those in Smithfield, RI at the Community/Performance conference, they might

talk about the power of discovering your voice and mixing it with other voices in a new, public creation. About how theatrical performance as a learning methodology is the best way to achieve truly collaborative learning. About playmaking giving people in prisons or kids living on the streets not only something creative to do but also a way to give expression to who they are. About working creatively with "the Other" as a way of learning about ourselves. As the rare psychologist participating in these conferences, I spoke in my presentations about performance and playmaking as key to human development. I told these inspiring educators that as far as I was concerned they were "the new psychologists," and I urged them to educate their psychologist colleagues about their work and discoveries. I told them that unless they did so and showed how what they were doing challenged psychology's individualistic

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MAKING PLAYS...



Lola Broomberg, Lois Holzman and Bonny Witkin at Pacific University in Eugene, Oregon.

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learning and development model, drama, theatre and performance work would continue to remain marginalized within school and social service settings (a complaint I heard repeatedly).

If you ask the developmental psychologists who attended the Jean Piaget Society conference on Social Development, Social Inequality and Social Justice in Toronto in June, most would say they'd never given playmaking, theatre and performance much thought. Some, however, would begin to speak about the critical importance of story making and narrative for healthy emotional, social, cognitive and moral development. I posed the question, "What is the 'Social' in 'Social Development'?" in my presentation, urging them to consider a social, rather than an individualistic, unit of development; to consider that what the various social units of development do is create varied performances. I suggested that if they took a fresh look at their own research from this vantage point they might see ensemble performance where previously they saw particular sequences of behaviors. That, in turn, might contribute to transforming psychology into the study of the social and the relational.

Playmaking is done by a social unit—it's impossible to miss that. Perhaps that accounts for how little attention psychology has given to the human capacity to perform. Perhaps it's too much of a challenge to the belief that the individual is the highest form of intelligence and creativity. Perhaps it's just too social! But as more and more people in more and more fields of work create plays with others, exercise the power of collective creativity and live their lives in ways that build community, the social becomes more difficult to ignore.

— Lois Holzman

TOP DOC



Influential internist, Susan Massad, M.D.

In its "Best Doctors" special issue, *New York Magazine* named Institute associate Susan Massad as one of New York's twelve most influential physicians for her pioneering work in effectively teaching doctors how to listen to their patients. Dr. Massad was recognized for creating – in partnership with consulting firm Performance of a Lifetime – the first comprehensive communications training to incorporate basic skills of theatrical improvisation. The program was launched at Long Island College Hospital and has now been introduced in an array of hospital settings and medical conferences nationally. (Read Dr. Massad's article, *Performance of Doctoring*, at www.eastsideinstitute.org.)

Since opening a new private practice in Brooklyn, Dr. Massad's work has focused on developing a group approach to dealing with health care issues that have traditionally been regarded as individualized medical problems. Partnering with colleagues at the Brooklyn Social Therapy Group and others from her network of health, movement and nutrition experts, she has begun a series of workshops in which patients can discuss important health issues in a group environment – expanding the possibilities beyond even the most positive one-on-one, doctor-patient interactions.

THE GIVING CIRCLE

The Institute has launched an annual giving campaign, wherein supporters give annual contributions of between \$50 and \$500 to the Institute's Development Campaign Fund and join the newly formed Giving Circle.

The Giving Circle is chaired by Susan Solomon, a long time institute supporter and member of the Institute's Circle of Development. Susan is leading the drive to raise \$10,000 in 2004.

"With the success of the annual Psych Out Awards benefit, we have built a solid foundation. The social therapeutic community can continue to invest in and nurture new approaches to human development, learning and community building across the globe," Solomon wrote in a recent fundraising appeal. "Millions of people around the world see no possibility for development. We have something powerful to offer – something ordinary people experience as genuinely helpful... I believe that we have a responsibility to make sure that those who want social therapy can have it."

For more information, or to make a contribution to the Giving Circle, please contact Mary Fridley at mfridley@eastsideinstitute.org.

"Let's talk about it" celebrates 10th anniversary



Program member Desire Creekmur (at podium) performed her poem, "Us."



Program founder Barbara Silverman (center right) poses with student members and alumni.



Student members Eric Diaz (left) and Jason Gallier.



Some of the "Let's Talk About It" posse – current members, alumni, and peer counselor Keatrice Lindsay (holding flowers, center).

lives. And over the last ten years, with over 2,700 young people voluntarily participating in over 35,000 visits, we've created a group approach that has helped shatter the stigma of having emotional problems."

Erasmus' 3,000+ student population includes a diverse mix of African American, Afro-Caribbean

and Latino students — many of whom are recent immigrants. It is located in an area known for its high levels of crime, AIDS, and drug activity. The "Let's Talk About It" groups are heterogeneous and inclusive by design. Young people drop by for a "Let's Talk About It" session, and in that process meet and mix with other teens whom they might otherwise have actively avoided.

Like many New York performances with a long and successful run, "Let's Talk About It" has gone on the road. Young people from the program routinely join Silverman to introduce the program at training seminars, professional conferences and to other school groups. They have addressed groups of physicians,

psychologists, and social workers eager to learn a method for empowering young people.

To learn more, go to www.eastsideinstitute.org to read Barbara Silverman and Nancy Feldman's chapter, "The Let's Talk About It Model: Engaging Young People as Partners in Creating Their Own Mental Health Program," which recently appeared in *Advances in School-Based Mental Health: Best Practices and Program Models*, K.E. Robinson, Ed.

On March 30 in a Brooklyn Boys & Girls Club, dozens of students, alumni, teachers and administrators celebrated the 10th anniversary of an unprecedented mental health program at Erasmus Hall High School called "Let's Talk About It." When school mental health programs exist at all, they are typically tucked away in a clinic and underutilized (or avoided) by students. What makes this program different? Why the balloons and excitement?

"We relate to the young people as partners in creating their emotional health," answers Barbara Silverman, founder of the program and an Institute faculty member. "I developed this program with the students, not for them. Our mission has been to help young people take responsibility for their

THE EAST SIDE INSTITUTE FOR GROUP AND SHORT TERM PSYCHOTHERAPY

AN INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR NEW APPROACHES TO HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

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New Training Opportunities!

- **Study at the Institute from anywhere on the globe.**

The International Class is a ten-month course of study with periodic residencies in New York City, mentoring at a distance and online study and discussion.

- **Create your own investigation.**

An Individualized Course of Study is an opportunity to study any aspect of social therapeutic methodology as it pertains to your professional work and interests.

For more information, please visit www.eastsideinstitute.org or contact Barbara Silverman at bsilverman@eastsideinstitute.org

The East Side Institute is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. We invite you to make tax-deductible contributions to support our development programs here and abroad. To explore opportunities for giving, please contact Mary Fridley, Director of Development at 212-941-8906 or mfridley@eastsideinstitute.org.

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