

Vibrant visions: A multi-modal workshop demonstrating the healing power of art, drumming and dance

Maralyn Nash with Sibou Bangoura and Yacou Mbaye

A video featuring the workshop may be viewed at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=758OWB-UkSQ

Keywords

Therapeutic art-making, cross-cultural art therapy, collaboration, communal healing experience

I've learned that people will forget what you said; people will forget what you did but people will never forget how you made them feel.

(Maya Angelou, 1969)

Conceptualised and led by Maralyn Nash, the 'Vibrant Visions' workshop at the 2013 ANZATA Conference offered arts therapies practitioners the opportunity to enrich their practice and engage in a collaborative process encompassing the disparate modes of art-making, drumming and dance. The workshop featured a West African drumming and dance performance by musicians Sibou Bangoura from Guinea and Yacou Mbaye from Senegal (Figure 1), followed by participation in a group drumming circle and the creation of a personal healing symbol. The workshop was intended to enable participants to experience what Nash calls 'the joy of self-expression' and to release their primal creative energy, inspired by the ceremonial and celebratory *djole* bass rhythm patterns of drumming from Sierra Leone in West Africa.

Some stills from the video of the workshop are included (see Figures 1 to 10). The reader is advised to view the video in its entirety, to gain a fuller picture of the experience and effects of the workshop.

The workshop began with a presentation in which Nash examined cross-cultural applications in arts therapies practice, bringing African perspectives on healing together with Western psychological paradigms such as somatic psychology (Sharaf, 1983), energy diagnostic treatment method (Gallo, 1998), and the expressive therapies continuum (Kagin & Lusebrink, 1978). Nash then introduced

examples of the cultural Adinkra symbols of the Asante people of Ghana as a reference for participants. She also wove her own story into this workshop through stories and photographs celebrating her love of African art and culture spanning three decades of adventurous journeys, inspirational art-making, marriage and motherhood.

Sibou Bangoura and Yacou Mbaye presented a contemporary West African cultural context in which participants could learn the elements of their drumming techniques and dance movements (Figure 2). Bangoura and Mbaye adapted traditional *djole* drumming patterns, so that the participants could play them on the *djembe*, and simplified the dance steps of the traditional *djole* style. Both musicians are from a traditional lineage of West African Griot families who are ancestral custodians and teachers of these cultural music and dance traditions. Their input enabled participants to embrace the powerful, experiential and cross-cultural artistic collaboration of an Indigenous West African communal healing experience.

As the video demonstrates, the methodology of teaching music in both traditional and contemporary African culture is learned experientially by participating in a drumming circle (Figure 3), in an interactive process between master teacher and student that blends oral, aural, visual and kinaesthetic strategies to facilitate the learning of rhythm patterns (Hess, 2009, p.58).

According to Anku (2000), "Circles have an important philosophical significance in the perception of the African reality of time" (p.6). Whether performed individually or shared as a

collective experience, the music is controlled by a recurrent rhythm consisting of a framework of multi-concentric rhythms on which various manipulations of the set are realised by the lead drummer (Anku, 2000).

In African community life, music is generally organised as a social event oriented towards high levels of community participation (Anku, 2000). There is also a shared understanding that the well-being of the individual is closely linked to his or her relationship with a wider family, community and spiritual life. By contrast, in current Western urban society, traditional family and community-based systems of support have become increasingly fragmented. The opportunity to participate in an African drumming circle brings a sense of kinship and community, promoting wholeness and holistic connection with each other in a state of pre-verbal connectedness and an authentic experience of unity. Participants were deeply engaged in the drumming experience (Figure 4). A connectedness emerged between them as they moved to a common rhythm (Figure 5).

In the final segment of the workshop, participants were provided with a range of art media, including pastels, paints, collage materials and clay, to select from and create their personal healing symbols as their response to the experience of this workshop (Figure 6). Participants became deeply absorbed in the art-making experience (Figure 7) and produced complex personal symbols (Figure 8).

At the conclusion, participants placed their personal healing symbols together in a circle for sharing, discussion and feedback (Figure 9). A community of collaborators emerged (Figure 10). The larger message was about celebrating creativity as a unifying and deeply healing global language and the power of community, belonging and coming together with like-minded people.

Nash's final words in this video echo those of a Hopi elder (paraphrased by Amanda Levey in her opening address to the ANZATA Conference in 2013):

In order not to be torn apart by these turbulent times, we have to let go of the shore and stay in the middle of the river,

in the unceasing flow of life. But they didn't say we have to do this alone. 'See who is there with you and celebrate', they said, 'The time of the lone wolf is over' (cited in Chodron, 2012, p.138).

As the video concludes, "We are the ones we've been waiting for".

Acknowledgements

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The presentation of this workshop is dedicated to the memory of Alex Kwaku Ohene of Ghana, West Africa (1946-2012), husband of Maralyn Nash.

Additional music (video)

National Dance Company of the Republic of Guinea. (1995). *Les Ballets Africains-Heritage*.

Track 2 - 'Boloba-Djoo-Lele'

Track 4 - 'Senekela-Tama Ningue'

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From top:
Figure 1.
Yacou Mbaye,
Maralyn Nash and
Sibou Bangoura.
Figure 2.
Sibou Bangoura
Figure 3.
Drumming circle.
Figure 4. Focus on
drumming.
Figure 5. Connected
through dance.



From top:
Figure 6. Creating
symbols.
Figure 7. Absorbed
in art-making.
Figure 8. Personal
healing symbols.
Figure 9. Workshop
feedback.
Figure 10. Circle of
collaborators.

