



A PROFESSIONAL'S GUIDE TO PROMOTING SELF-DISCOVERY

© **IN YOUTH** ©

A Creative-Based Curriculum

Lissa Masters, Ph.D., ATR

**A Professional's Guide
to Promoting
Self-Discovery in Youth**
A Creative-Based Curriculum



I am an ARTIST creating my life NOW!

This book belongs to:

Contact information if found:

“That which we are, we shall teach.”

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

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By
Lissa Masters, Ph.D., ATR



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FOR THE CHILDREN:

Those who are grown,
those who are growing,
and those who have not yet arrived.

Preface

It is with the proper alignment of the stars that this book has manifested. The words waited patiently, and have now jumped excitedly onto these pages to form a tool that can serve in revolutionizing education. Education is the alchemical key to the evolution and enlightenment of humanity. This curriculum (Lessons for Living Program™) is especially intended for art therapists, therapists, life coaches, and counselors to bring into school environments with adopted holistic principles. Its contents offer youth a foundational program of self-exploration, an important support for all other learning that will take place in preparation for adulthood. I am honored to be a part of this book's mission, and I extend gratitude to everyone who played a role in its production.

— *Lissa Masters*

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becoming skilled artists in the ART of Life. Your work and service benefits us all!

Namaste

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Introduction

The ideas that formulated this book began to percolate in the early nineties. I had been hired for an art teacher position at a small, public alternative high school in Norwalk, Connecticut; a place where the city sequestered potential “dropouts,” and faculty shepherded them toward a graduating diploma. The school accommodated pregnant teens and their preschoolers, the smaller student/teacher ratio benefited students with behavior issues, and the school’s early dismissal helped to curb habitual delinquency.

In the earlier days the school offered vocational training along with core subjects required for graduation. Students could focus on automotive repair, metal shop, typing, or cooking, giving students additional assurance for entering the workforce. The art room at this time served as a popular haven where students could relax, socialize, and learn new art skills. Most importantly, it became a space where opportunities were provided to express strong emotions through art-making.

Each morning students lumbered into my classroom appearing lethargic and defeated, sometimes excited, or perhaps angry and agitated. It was important to be skillfully attentive to each individual’s needs. Many students carried troubling stories they wanted to share, and confronted decisions that were difficult to navigate. I found myself naturally using art experiences to assist students in understanding their feelings. Artwork became a vehicle of communication and a tool for emotional healing. Exhibiting their creations in the school hall enhanced the student’s self-esteem, and although there was an ongoing concern with vandalism, this art was only admired. Some art was just about the process. These pieces were hidden or discarded after the student witnessed revealing aspects. However, these too contributed toward the emergence of a healthy sense of self.

It was soon apparent why my art room seemed to magnetize students. One afternoon after I described my day’s activities, a colleague explained how I was providing a kind of “art therapy,” a term I was not familiar with at the time. I was very interested in learning more about how therapeutic art activities could be used in a classroom. Fellow art teachers suggested I read Peter London’s book, *No More Secondhand Art*. His words spoke to me so deeply that I eagerly enrolled in a weeklong summer intensive that he taught in Massachusetts. I supported London’s recognition of how art can be considered a sacred artifact. He compared this to ancient primal people making art not merely for decoration or self-expression, but

rather a vehicle of profound personal or collective transformation. That summer class proved to be a “peak” experience that nudged me to change my career intentions, as I later pursued graduate work in art therapy at Pratt Institute in New York. The diagnostic and analysis theories that I learned were interesting, but what really excited me were the experiential benefits of art for self-discovery and attaining “wholeness.”

I was still teaching at the school as I continued my studies, steadily introducing my students to new activities each year that were intrinsically motivating. The curriculum I developed was well-rounded. It consisted of a basic art foundation with an exploration of various media, and included exercises practiced individually or in small groups to promote personal discovery. It became evident that the emotional needs of my students were being addressed more fully through art-making. To broaden the experience I provided exercises on basic life skills that I felt were neglected, yet vital. These art activities examined the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual components of the individual. I was drawn to the work of pioneer art therapist, Shaun McNiff, who spoke of art being akin to “soul medicine.” McNiff’s philosophy of art and its therapeutic value strongly inspired my personal ideology. My own “toolbox” was forming, already filled with a spiritual intention that I believed was all encompassing; and with this, tools gathered from wise teachers who met me on my path.

In 1998 life presented me with a huge “Yield” sign, as I suddenly was thrust into a serious health challenge. My recovery was an opportunity to learn more about the healing arts, and find more balance in my life by taking better care of my own needs. I was fascinated by Judith Cornell’s work about mandalas, Lucia Capacchione’s work with journaling, and Carolyn Myss’s work that centered on the intuitive energetic body we all possess. It was time to change my lifestyle, and what a better place to do that in but California. I left my job and headed there in 2001, feeling renewed and liberated.

Northern California was idyllic for almost four years. I concentrated on expressing all the art forms that hungered for my personal attention. Music, chanting, writing, theatre, abstract painting, and Barbara Mettler style dancing were areas I happily immersed myself in, supported by newfound friends and holistic living. In 2004, I moved back to the East Coast to be closer to family. There on the outer banks of North Carolina I met a woman at a drumming circle who described herself as an expressive arts therapist. I was intrigued, because my own therapeutic “toolbox” was now heavy with a plethora of expressive art modalities.

This encounter led me to the doorsteps of Appalachian State University where I was introduced to Sally Atkins, a highly regarded expressive arts therapy instructor whom I studied with briefly.

Life on the East Coast felt unsettling, and in 2005 I returned “home” to California. Once again regaining balance, I explored the array of options available for the schooling of children—still a primary passion. I read many books about non-traditional approaches to learning. I applied to work at a Montessori school in the Bay area after feeling ignited by Maria Montessori’s writings in her numerous books. Her regard for honoring the natural physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual development of every child resonated with me.

In 2008 my dedication to improve our education system propelled me into a postgraduate study of holistic counseling. I began to write a curriculum that could be used in progressive learning environments. My experience at the Montessori school helped me to shape the format for this endeavor. Of course, the curriculum would need to weave creativity with a structure of life lessons that would guide students to make positive, conscious choices. The work of Natalie Rogers and her person-centered approach to expressive arts therapy was influential to my book’s content. I was first introduced to this philosophy in 2010, when I attended a series of expressive arts workshops with therapists Anin Utigaard and Sophia Reinders who shared how they apply this work in clinical practice. Roger’s encouragement of counselors to “follow a client,” and ways to creatively connect a combination of art processes to promote well-being, aligned with my intentions. I began a certificate program with Natalie Rogers in 2013 to further integrate her work with my contribution to art therapy and education.

The knowledge garnered on my path culminated in this facilitator guide, which offers a means for self-awareness and discovery. The curriculum begins with an exploration of the Physical Body, followed by the Mental, Emotional, and Spiritual Body. Each domain has ten lessons, each one initially presented by the facilitator. Students use self-inquiry to explore a lesson as far as they choose, creative expressive activities help answer their questions. Parents and teachers have appreciated this meaningful holistic curriculum (Lessons for Living Program™) that ensures a more complete educational experience for children. This learning affords students an ability to mark their journey from child to adulthood with ease and confidence. Children enjoy participating in the engaging lessons, and relish the personal insight gained from them. So too, the program instills in students a significant respect for all people and life forms—a generous gift that radiates peace for our planet.