

Expressive Arts as a Therapeutic Intervention: A Sāmoan Case Study.

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Abstract

Expressive arts have been used for therapeutic purposes for centuries and today therapists use the arts to heal a range of recognised psychological problems. Many of the current commentaries and research reports have been concerned with children and adolescents who have been traumatised. However, there is minimal robust research and investigations of the efficacy of impacts and detailed descriptions of programmes are needed. In this case study a Sāmoan ‘art as therapy’ programme is briefly outlined describing the activities developed in a school district. It was designed to assist 177 children traumatised by a tsunami in 2009. Another purpose of this study was to identify the outputs of the expressive arts programme and the students’ responses to the intervention. Using different modes of the arts, the children displayed their sorrow, disbelief and anguish at first and then, as the programme developed, a noticeable improvement in mood was detected. Most of the children indicated that it was a useful programme for them and sought additional similar experiences. The implications, recommendations and limits of the research are discussed.

Keywords: expressive arts, therapy, trauma, tsunami

Introduction

Engaging in expressive art activities has been recognized for centuries as having therapeutic value. Using arts as an adjunct to psychological and psychiatric treatment grew in the 19th Century culminating in the development of a formalized discipline in the next Century with formal training of art therapists. Accordingly, there is now considerable literature about the positive contributions of the arts to the mental health of children (and increasingly adults). Indeed, there are many reports of how the arts have been specifically employed to promote healing in a range of psychological problems including the effects of physical illness, behavioural problems and psychological trauma associated with natural disasters, abuse, accident, war and domestic violence. Nevertheless, more studies are needed to ascertain the efficacy of interventions, how they work and the nature of their application. In this evaluation study, a therapeutic expressive arts programme is detailed and its outcomes outlined for the traumatised children.

Literature Review

There is a range of expressive arts disciplines. The expressive arts (alternatively known as the creative arts) include visual art, music, dance/movement, drama, poetry, creative story writing, bibliotherapy and play (Malchiodi 2014). Although excluding music, the following definition provides a succinct account of the therapeutic process;

[Expressive therapies].... are a form of psychotherapy that uses creative modalities, including visual art-making, drama, and dance/movement to improve and inform physical, mental and emotional well-being. Arts therapy works by accessing imagination and creativity, which can generate new models of living, and contribute towards the

development of a more integrated sense of self, with increased self-awareness and acceptance (ANZATA 2012).

An expressive arts therapist uses these modes of expression and integrates them with a psychological therapy to create a unique intervention for a client. This may occur over a period of time and vary in nature but typically includes a warm-up activity, goal setting and investigation of the issues via the expressive arts. For example, the therapist may ask the client to draw a picture of the idea and create a story about it rather than discuss it in detail. The therapist and client then interact about this drawing to facilitate meaning, understanding and resolution.

Malchiodi (2005) makes the point that expressive art therapies can have a unique dimension, sometimes not located in traditional psychotherapy. She states they often promote a speedier self-exploration more than verbal expression which may be constrained. Secondly, they are action oriented and the doing, making and creating energizing the client to move forward. Another quality is the prominence of an individual's imagination which can consider the past and future and hence is an important reflection tool. Furthermore, expressive arts can facilitate improved psychosomatic responses for example; traumatic stress can be alleviated by releasing the stored memories via the arts leading to a healthier somatic response. As Malchiodi states these benefits create a healing uniqueness and can effectively complement traditional psychotherapy.

An important issue relates to the nature of the arts interventions. Essentially, the question revolves around the role of the expressive arts as a formal therapeutic intervention versus its value in itself to heal. Although some argue for the primacy of therapeutic intent, it is mostly agreed by experts that arts alone have capacity to heal. For example, Malchiodi (2013) refers to a continuum of practice—'art as therapy' and 'art therapy'. She noted that 'art as therapy' embodies the idea that art making is, in and of itself, therapeutic and that the creative process is a growth-producing experience. The Editor of Art Therapy (2008), in commenting upon the difference between art and art therapy, advances Malchiodi approach in stating;

From my perspective, therapy is better defined by the individual. If walking around a park helps you relieve tension, that's therapy. If painting is a remedial or rehabilitative process for you, it's therapy...more specifically, it's art therapy. Any act or hobby that is curative or healing in some way would be considered therapy. If that act or hobby is art, then that is art therapy.

Central to the idea of arts being healing is the creative process but is it also related to the facilitator relationship or is it this and the therapist interpretation and leading role that helps the client to help solve the issues? One means of understanding this difference is to consider the analogous situation of counselling. Roger's (1986) humanistic client-centered approach is based on the notion that the conditions for psychological growth are made available for the client to enable healing whereas other counselling approaches endorse this but also indicate the lead role and action strategies implemented by the counsellor as being significant. Jones-Smith (2014) indicates that

both approaches can be effective. Likewise, in both of the arts approaches, it would appear that the creative activity along with a facilitative role are important (Malchiodi 2013).

A number of commentaries have discussed the use of the arts as therapy and art therapy to assist healing. These reports have mostly considered children and adolescents and a range of these is discussed in this section. In a historical account, spanning a period of almost 200 years, Frost (2005) charted how children had coped and had developed fortitude in very adverse situations (such as the holocaust) by being engaged in activities involving play, work and the creative arts. In a more specific applied sense, a number of other sources have provided accounts of how the arts can be used purposefully. For example, Carey (2006) provided a comprehensive overview of how various well-designed programmes have contributed to the psychological well-being of young people who have been traumatised. Furthermore, in a survey of the research on classroom-based programmes, Beauregard (2014) outlined the usefulness of expressive arts for those who had experienced either conflict in their country, natural disasters, severe economic disadvantage or refugee turmoil. A 4 week arts therapy programme in a school in Sri Lanka to help children overcome the impact of the widespread 2004 Asian tsunami was outlined by Chilcote (2007) as an effective approach. Similarly, in a Polynesian context, Latai and Taavao (2012) detailed how the school context was used as the centre of the community to develop a programme assisting children in Sāmoa to manage the suffering that followed a tsunami in 2009. All of these accounts are indicative of a growing literature on the value of expressive arts for healing and many are accompanied by recommendations for further development. Under-pinning all these studies however is the importance detailed to cultural, ethical and spiritual aspects in the recovery programmes (Varghese 2010).

Although the literature is growing, there are not only calls for more research but also additional information about the specific characteristics of the programs and how they are implemented. van Westrhenen and Fritz (2014) have concluded in an exhaustive survey of the research that methodological issues have prevented it being viewed as an equally effective approach to other psychotherapies. Malchiodi (2005) acknowledges this and indicated the need for wide ranging research and investigations into the efficacy of the use of arts to heal. The development of quantitative approaches are needed however to balance the emphasis upon the qualitative (Leavy 2015). In the following case study, a programme to help children overcome the trauma associated with a tsunami is outlined and the associated research was designed to assess the efficacy and value of the program. It considers an expressive arts program in a cultural context outlines programme specifics and reports on qualitative and quantitative data outcomes.

A Sāmoan Case Study: The Moving On Art as Therapy Program

Background

In 2009 Sāmoa was struck by an earthquake of more than 8.3 on the Richter scale and the entire southern side of the island of Upolu was overwhelmed by a tsunami wave. The devastation resulted in 143 lives being lost. One aspect of particular concern was the impact upon the children who witnessed and experienced these events. Therefore, the Moving On: Art as Therapy Program was developed in 2010 to facilitate the healing process for the children of the Aleipata district and six workshops were conducted over a period of six months. It was understood that the programme would provide an opportunity for the children and the community to improve their emotional well-being and stress levels via a self-exploration of the events and aftermath. Furthermore, it provided an opportunity for the development of a contextually-driven model for helping in times of disaster and would also add to the existing international literature. One of the authors, Leua Latai, Senior Lecturer for Visual Arts at the National University of Sāmoa, designed and developed the research programme and led the implementation of it. The school community and the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture whole-heartedly supported the programme and this provided the implementer an added incentive to develop a local programme of support. The research component of the programme was also developed by Dr Lex McDonald (Victoria, University of Wellington, New Zealand) a child psychologist of experience of many years.

The programme was conducted at three sites—Satitōa and Lalomanu Primary Schools and Aleipata Secondary School. Most of the children at the 3 sites were either at school or on their way to school when the tsunami arrived. The art activities consisted of creative movement to music, drawing and painting, creative story writing and puppetry drama.

The programme consisted of the following components:

1. Warm up: greeting, welcoming and movement to music activities. Laughter and noise was encouraged but wind down closure involved relaxing to soft classical music.
2. Sharing mood sessions: students were asked to share how they felt at the time (eg., sad, happy)
3. Art as therapy activity: creative writing (poetry and story writing), painting and drawing to music and drama (puppetry) to capture their mood particularly with regard to upsetting concerns.
4. Warm down: After the art activities students were asked to talk about their artwork (thoughts and feelings) which were then displayed on the classroom walls.

A significant part of the program was the sharing and reflection of the student creations with other students and the facilitators, and a community exhibition of

artworks and story books. Data relating to the paintings, drawings, creative stories and poetry was collected during the art as therapy activities.

Methodology

This research utilised a mixed qualitative and quantitative design but with an emphasis on qualitative data. The emphasis upon the qualitative research approach was important because it was the specific and unique feelings, emotions and expressed responses of the participants that were being sought. Quantitative data was an additional aspect designed to support and align with the qualitative aspects as well as provide a simple measure of the relative value of the programme to the participants.

The participants of the study were the 177 children and young adults (ranging from 5 to 18 years) who were affected by the tsunami. Some data was also collected from the parents who collaborated with the children. The facilitator was the Senior Lecturer for Visual Arts from the local university and supported by the principals and school teachers from the community.

The products collected included drawings, paintings, creative stories and poetry. These were then photographed and displayed and sessions were recorded on video. Structured interviews were also undertaken with the children and data concerning the overall impressions of the programme was collected. Firstly, there were large group interviews (approximately 15 children) led by the programme coordinator, and this was followed by small group interviews (five–six children) whereby children were interviewed individually to expand on the identified issues. These group sessions not only provided access to data but also became a means of peer support.

A simplified thematic analysis (refer to Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2010) was used to analyse the data. This approach was used to capture dense data—the insights, responses resulted in rich data most useful for assessing the impact of an exploratory programme. All the obtained data (drawings, paintings, written work and interviews) were gathered and both researchers jointly allocated codes to the artefacts. These codes were then grouped into patterns/categories and on interpretation of these, the themes were detected. To ensure consistency, the process was repeated some weeks later but no significant differences were noted. A theme was identified by examining the codes and patterns and if there was a durable repetitiveness of ideas represented in any and across the different genres then a theme was recognised. Furthermore, information collected from the sharing sessions and interviews was detailed as narratives and percentages of responses were used to analyse the data obtained from the interviews.

The trustworthiness of the qualitative data was ensured by the range of student responses, the gathering of student artefacts, a colleague evaluating the data and the fidelity of the overall research process plan.

Ethics approval for the study was obtained from the National University of Sāmoa Ethics Committee.

Findings

This research was undertaken to identify the outcomes of The Moving on Art as Therapy Program which was designed to enable the children to express their feelings following the experience of the tsunami. The programme enabled the children to share their thoughts, fears, sorrows, grief, hopes, and the need for rebuilding and the expectation for moving to a better life. The results, as indicated below, revealed that the programme was a useful vehicle to provide for expression of feelings and communication (the key purposes of a therapeutic arts programme).

Observations

During the programme implementation, the children's (and others) feelings and behaviour provided insight into the emotional impacts. Many responses of the children, teachers and parents were documented on video and although these recordings were not planned to be part of the programme, they added further meaning and corroborative evidence of what was occurring in the programme implementation. It was observed for example the stress impacts on the children—several of them developed diurnal enuresis which persisted for several months. Furthermore, often it was recorded that the children, teachers and parents wept as they voluntarily shared their stories which frequently resulted in a close emotional bonding and support.

Although the programme was designed to facilitate the children's responses, many of the adults (parents, teachers, and other community members) personally engaged and benefitted from it. For example, some parents participated in the book project and discussed their feelings and emotions and when the art was displayed one evening there was overwhelming support of the parents and other community members. It was observed that parents solemnly viewed and commented emotionally on their children's art.

Some parents sobbed as they stood quietly viewing the children's work, uninterested in the food that was provided. One commented, "I was not aware that our children were consumed with these vivid memories". When stories were read by the children there was silence and physical comforting (e.g., hugging, cuddling, holding and touching each other) as well as verbal support whilst the teachers and parents, consoled and comforted each other as well.

Furthermore, it was observed that some of the children had strong emotional responses. For example, one Year five student drew a picture of the tsunami and its effects, then bent and kissed it acknowledging the human figure in the drawing. His peers looked on quietly.

After several weeks of sharing sessions, it was evident that a closeness amongst the children, research team, teachers and parents had developed. Furthermore, many of the children not involved developed a curiosity, peering through the windows of the room indicating that they wanted to participate. (The programme targeted a group of

10 students from each grade but due to the overwhelming interest of other students it was opened up to all).

Expressions via Drawings, Paintings and Written Work

The children were encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings via drawings, paintings and written accounts and many of these responses were further explored when the interviews and other interactions with the children, teachers and parents occurred. It was designed to facilitate emotional responses and this was achieved—a range of emotions and thoughts were revealed. In the analysis a number of themes were detected—death, fear, destruction, heroes, spirituality and moving forward, the most powerful and evocative being concerns with death and fear of the tsunami.

Theme 1: Death

Many of the children indicated a pre-occupation with death and dying and this was depicted in their drawings, paintings and writings. One secondary student commented:

I didn't care about anything I ran as fast as I could towards the mountains distraught hearing the cries of people dying and feeling helpless as there was nothing I could do. I kept running and crying death was upon us.

Verbal and written accounts of the wave included descriptions of it as the arrival of death. For example, one student from Aleipata stated “I stood there and looked at the arrival of death. The wave soaring over me like a massive giant God’s wrath didn’t have any boundaries of whom to take”. Another student in her story book wrote “For about thirty minutes I floated around hanging on to a large piece of wood, when I heard a voice crying out ‘I want to live’. I felt helpless for there was nothing I could do”. One other student drew the tsunami and described his pleas: “It looked like a fierce animal. I saw people of my village running and screaming. Please God I don’t want to die. I murmured to myself, God protect us, remain faith in us.”

Some children reported seeing naked corpses strewn around their community and a number of them indicated the stench of death. A Year nine student described the corpses: “I witnessed the death of the elderly and young. Their mouths and faces were covered with mud and dirtwere bloated and swollen from swallowing seawater and started to smell.”

Other children discussed death and in their aiga and the destruction it brought. The drawings portrayed decapitated bodies, naked corpses, coffins and destruction of their village. For example, in figure 1 a drawing by a Year 10 student depicts a victim a member of his aiga drowning which he witnessed.

Figure 1: Drawing by a Year 10 student. Aleipata, 2010.



Theme 2: Fear

Associated with death concerns many children indicated the fear of the “aitu,” (monster wave), its impact and the likelihood of return. The following drawing in Figure 2 by a Year one student depicts the huge face of the aitu. The descriptions and depictions of the tsunami wave were variously termed aitu, temoni (demon), monster, sauai (giant), a man, manu feai (wild beast), uliuli e pei o se malala (black as charcoal), foliga e pei o se temoni (features like a demon), foliga saua (expressions of fuming rage), blood wave (galutoto) and wave of wrath.

Figure 2: Year 1 student depiction of the tsunami. Aleipata, 2010.



Figure 3: Year 9 student depiction of the tsunami wave. Aleipata, 2010.



In the verbal accounts and representations by the participants it was noted that the younger children referred mostly to the tsunami as a monster, whereas the older children discussed the wave in terms of the destruction and damage as in figure 3. To some of the children and parents the cause of the tsunami was rationalized as a consequence of the wrath of God for the desecration of their land due to change and modernization. For example, in the following excerpts some students’ poetry from

students at the secondary school indicated the wrath of God and the consequences of not abiding God's law. A Year 10 student wrote;

God's wrath

*"I have witnessed God's wrath
It is Gods will and wisdom."*

Another student stated:

*"Sāmoa, Behold
Prepare for the day of reckoning
Honour the Sabbath."*

A number of drawings, paintings and stories were about the attempts to escape the tsunami. One student wrote about his experience and fear of the tsunami as a horrifically saddening experience;

The tidal wave wiped out the entire district and it was as high as a mountain and like a man. It uprooted the trees and destroyed the houses even the churches. It was a sad time and dark morning and sorrowful one because many people were killed and injured.

Figures 4, 5 and 6 are illustrations of these fears that were expressed by the students.

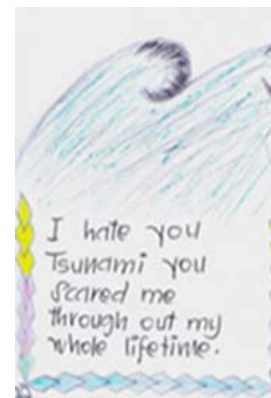
Figure 4: Illustrations of fear depicted by Year 9 student. Aleipata, 2010.



Figure 5: Illustration of fear, running away from the tsunami by Year 9 student. Aleipata, 2010.



Figure 6: Depiction of feelings about the tsunami, Year 10 student. Aleipata, 2010.



In the group interviews there was also constant references to fear of death. A Year nine student stated: "When I saw the wave I ran as fast as I could with fear with my younger brother followingracing towards the mountains. The only sounds we heard were those of the dying".

Understandably, drawings and paintings of fear and death dominated the first weeks of the programme. A number of the children drew images of dead people and some sketched the hospital with the wounded as (depicted below in figures 7 and 8). In figure 9 another student illustrated rows of coffins for his villagers with the Red-Cross

symbol attached. However, as the programme continued the horrific images began to subside and the art focused on what was currently happening in their environment.

Figure 7: Victims of the tsunami illustration by Year 8 student. Aleipata, 2010.

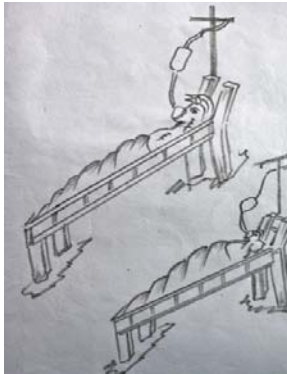
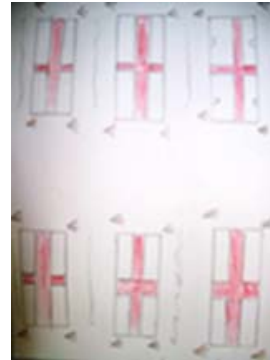


Figure 8: The wounded and dead of the tsunami disaster, illustration by Year 9 student. Aleipata, 2011.



Figure 9: Coffins of the tsunami victims, depiction by Year 8 student. Aleipata, 2010.



Theme 3: Environmental Destruction

A third theme that arose was the awareness of the environmental destruction. Extensive damage was caused to the landscape, crops, churches, and school buildings, and this was documented by the children. A student from the Secondary school described the following;

We witnessed the entire depletion of our village. People's homes were torn apart, cars were thrown everywhere and people's personal belongings were scattered all over. The number of dead corpses was staggering and we witnessed bodies piling up. We live up in the mountains now and refuse to go back to the coastal area where we once lived.

A student observation of the wave's destruction in her poem "O le Galulolo" (The Tsunami), described how, in one minute, the wave had destroyed homes, houses and church buildings.

*"These one minute visits
Were horrific acts
Brick houses, church buildings and two storey homes
Graves and tombs were uprooted
Tourist sites were desecrated."*

The following illustrations depict the destruction of the environment as understood by the children (refer Figures 10 and 11).

Figure 10: Destruction of the environment caused by the tsunami by Year 10 student. Aleipata, 2010



Figure 11: Environmental destruction drawing by a Year 10 student. Aleipata, 2010.



Theme 4: Heroes and Support

Immediately after the tsunami, support arrived and the children acknowledged this in their art. Support of the local community, agencies, government and international groups and other nations arrived quickly and for many students these people were seen as heroes, saviours and god's servants. For example, in figure 12 a student wrote:

This is the truck, the Red Cross truck and the tank, we are very lucky to have a water tank, without the water tank we wouldn't be able to survive. We have everything now, cups, bowls, spoons, forks, and clothing. I would like to thank those who have come to help us because of the tsunami and to Gods servants for all these gifts.

Figure 12: Soldier hero who assisted, drawn by a Year 3 student. Aleipata, 2010.

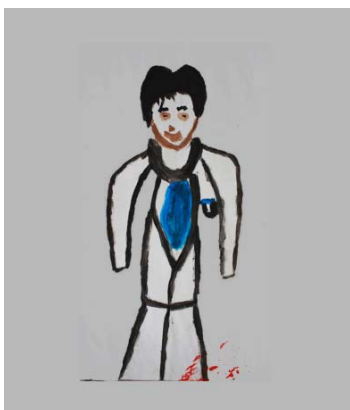


Figure 13: Red Cross truck bringing in aid, illustration by Year 9 student. Aleipata, 2010.



Some of the children of Satitua Primary School drew pictures of the New Zealand Air Force helicopters and a Year 2 Satitua Primary student discussed his picture about the soldier hero who helped his family (figure 12).

Theme 5: Importance of Spirituality

Another discernible theme was the importance of spirituality. The tsunami was interpreted alongside the people's strong commitment to Christian beliefs and also there was an intermingling of significant cultural beliefs tied to the "va tapuia," (sacredness) of their land. Sāmoa is built on a foundation of belief in God and this has significance for daily living and for managing understanding about untoward events. In times of crisis therefore, there is a seeking of solace and comfort that can be gained from Christianity and for many this support was invaluable in dealing with the tsunami. It was stated by some that the *va tapuia* was broken when the community permitted modernisation and the tsunami was a consequence. A student from Aleipata Secondary School wrote: "God gives and takes. Let us not take the tsunami lightly. To my village and family let us try to attend church and repent so we may receive God's blessings three fold."

Others made drawings in their storybooks and comments in the sharing sessions relating to spiritual issues. For example, in figure 14, a painting by a five-year-old girl from Satitua Primary School portrayed the rainbow symbolizing heaven. The two rectangular shapes outlined in pink with two female stick figures were the coffins of her relatives and she went on to describe how happy she was that her aunt was safe in heaven. In figure 15 below, a Satitua student illustrated the Ten Commandments.

Figure 14: Heaven illustrated by 5 year old student. Aleipata, 2010.



Figure 15: A Year 6 student illustrates the Bible. Aleipata, 2010.



Theme 6: Moving Forward

After several months, it was noted that the responses of the children, teachers, and parents began to consider the future, thinking about rebuilding and reconstruction. This was a force that promoted resilience and energised people to promote development and regain stability.

The sorrow and grief however was to some extent a necessary phase because it foreshadowed the beginnings of hope, rebuilding and moving forward. Hope was

depicted in the work of the children—they were beginning to accept what was happening. Others indicated the positive effects of personal growth, social support and coping. The hope for these children had numerous meanings however—for example, drawings of peaceful landscapes, pictures displayed super heroes, red-cross, aid programs, helicopters, planes and daily necessities of food, clothing and reconstruction work. It was a movement towards the future a rebuilding mentally and physically. The artworks depicted an increase of hope focusing on the more optimistic in contrast with earlier works—there were several painting documenting an increased quality of life.

A Year 9 student from the secondary school wrote:

If you look at our village now everyone has everything in their homes houses are built electricity restored and installed to our new location.....Some of the houses that were destroyed by the tsunami are now been rebuilt. The only sad part is that no one lives where we used to live where our village used to be. In the mornings at six everyone heads down to where our old village used to be and see them return at four in the evening for supper. In the evenings there are volley ball games and the young and old hang out in the evenings”.

The images the children drew in the latter months focused on rebuilding and the reconstructing of their environment. For example, in figure 16 below a Satitōa student painted Namu’a Island without the ravages caused by the tsunami. The island was back to normal—he painted Namu’a Island with green trees, beach *fales* where they were before the tsunami and kayaks, canoes, birds and fish in the water.

Figure 16: Namua Island without the ravages of the tsunami. Illustration by a Year 6 student. Aleipata, 2010.



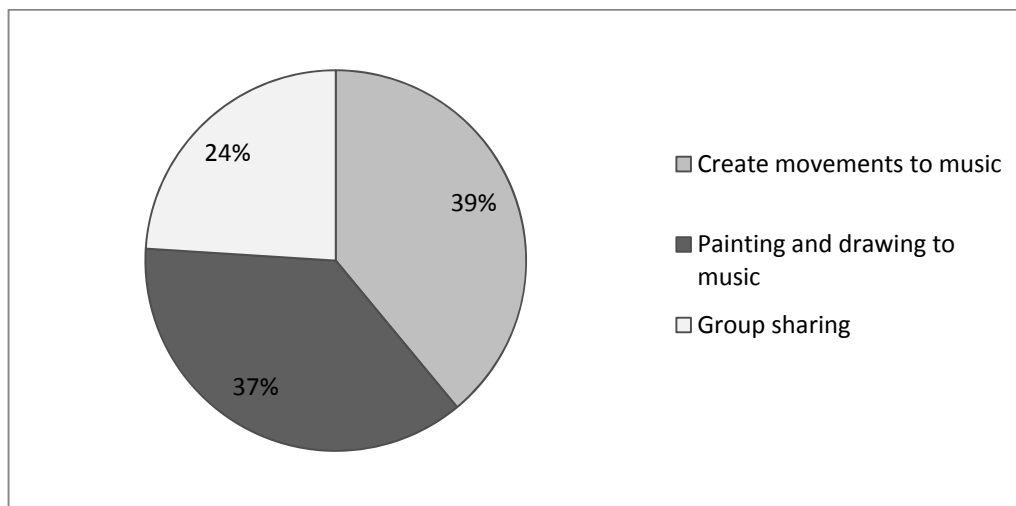
Structured Group Interviews

The group interviews were designed to evaluate the children’s responses to the intervention. A simple analysis of the quantitative data considered the overall impressions, favourite activities, coping strategies, helpfulness of the programme and areas for improvement. Overall, the programme was regarded very favourably and considered most useful. Table 1 summarises these findings.

Table 1: Percentage Responses from the Interview

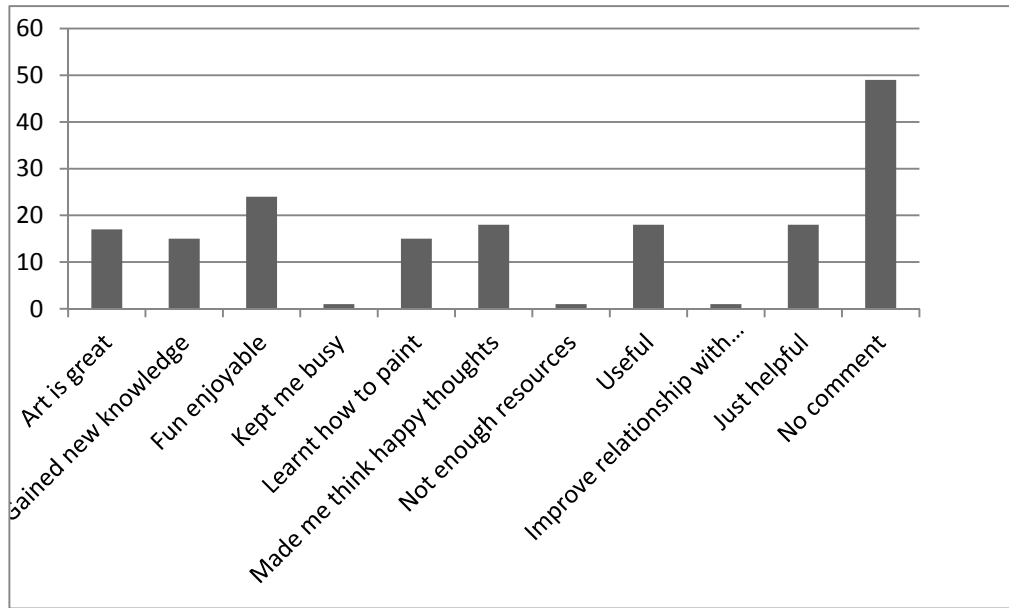
Question Item	% (117 participants)
Did you enjoy creative movement to music activities?	39
Did you enjoy painting and drawing?	37
Did you enjoy the sharing sessions?	24
Did the programme help you forget sad and painful memories?	89
Did the programme suit you and no need for change?	44
Overall, were the activities meaningful?	90
(Emotional) Difficulties – painting and drawing the tsunami	33
(Emotional) Difficulties – writing and drawing about the tsunami	4
Would you like the programme to continue?	53
Would you like art as a subject at your school?	35
Would you like the art therapy programme to continue for you?	24
Would you like programme to be made available for others?	18

Favourite Art Therapy Activities



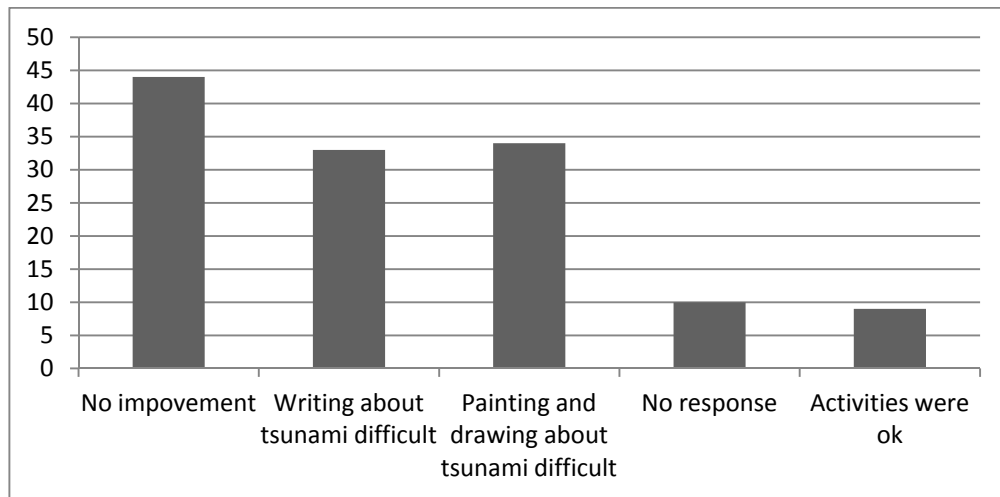
The favourite Art Therapy Activity the children enjoyed the most was the Creative Movements to Music 39 percent, Painting and Drawing 37 percent and Group Sharing 24 percent. Other art therapy activities included puppetry, poetry and book making.

Was the Art Therapy Programme Helpful?



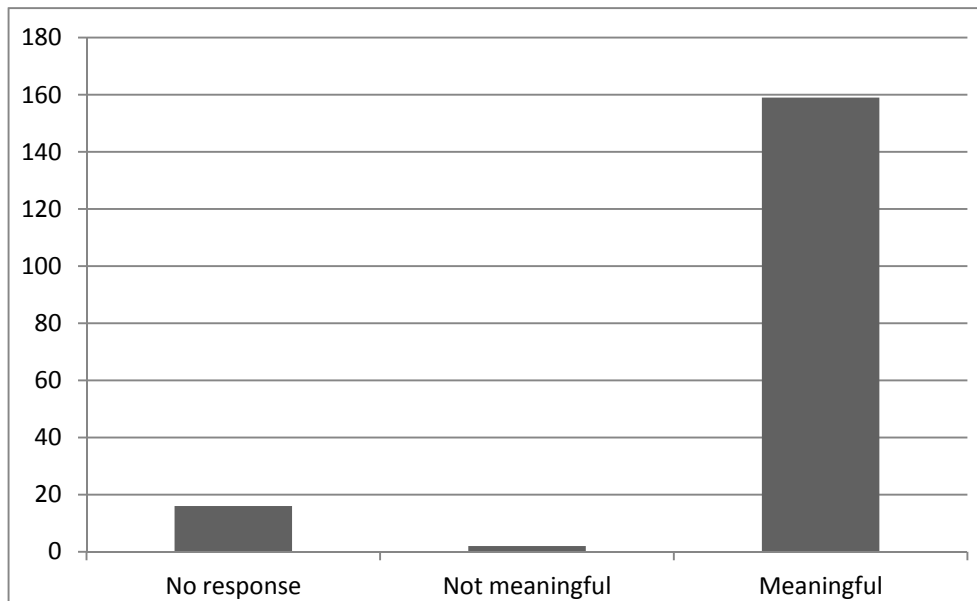
This graph illustrates the participant's response to the Art Therapy Intervention. They were asked whether they found the art therapy program useful. 24 percent said the activities were fun and enjoyable, 18 percent found the projects useful, allowed them to think and feel happy thoughts for a moment and 49 percent did not comment.

Areas of Improvement



The participants were asked if the Moving on Art Therapy Program needed improvement. 44 percent said they liked the program as is and it needed no improvement, 33 percent found writing about the tsunami difficult, 34 percent said that painting and drawing about their tsunami experience difficult, 10 percent didn't respond and nine percent thought the activities were ok.

Were the Art Therapy Projects 'meaningful'?



159 participants found the Art Therapy Projects meaningful.

One of the features of these findings was that none of the children had art as a subject in their curriculum—the novelty of the activities may have resulted in the positive responses to the programme. However, the trends were evident and it appeared that the programme had served its purpose—and only a few wanted to continue to discuss the tsunami.

The favoured art therapy activities included painting and drawing, creative movements to music and group sharing sessions. It was indicated by 39 percent of the participants that they enjoyed the creative movements to music, 37 percent liked the painting and drawing and 24 percent noted the importance of the sharing sessions. In response to how the art therapy program helped, 89 percent replied that the activities helped them forget painful and sad memories as well as it keeping them physically and mentally alive it focused them on happier thoughts. Some indicated they had never engaged in such activities before and had learnt new skills (i.e., drawing and painting), as well as developing new knowledge useful for their future. When asked if the activities were meaningful, 90 percent responded that they found it so. The programme suited 44 percent (with no need for improvement) whilst, 33 percent indicated painting and drawing about the tsunami was difficult, 32 percent found the painting and drawing challenging and four percent found thought that writing and drawing about the tsunami was difficult. Some commented on the need for more time to complete tasks while a few others found it a struggle to understand the English language. Over half of the participants (53 percent) stated that they would like the program to continue, 35 percent wanted art to be introduced as a subject and wanted an art teacher at their school, 24 percent expressed specific interest in art as therapy programme continuance and 18 percent recommended the program to be continued to create opportunities for other children. On the other hand, two percent didn't want discussions on tsunami to

be included as a topic again although conversely two percent felt the programme should continue to remind them of the tsunami and to heal their pains.

This quantitative data, although not directly measuring outcomes in terms of healing, provided a generally positive account of the programme and it can be interpreted that the activities promoted positive opportunities for the participants' expressions. Some encountered difficulties with the specifics of the programme however, although it was difficult to assess whether this was because of the nature of the topic or the modes of expression.

Summary

Observations relating to the children, parents and teachers' responses to the tsunami were indicative of a grief response with noted emotional responsibility, seeking of support and profound pain and shock. This was the context in which the expressive arts programme operated. The findings relating to the outputs of the programme resulted in a number of themes. The observation of death in the community was a key theme because it was a traumatic reality for many of the children, parents, and teachers and fear of the tsunami was another key theme with the *aitu* identified as a monster or a powerful destructive force. The destruction of the community was alluded to by many of the participants as well. In all the drawings and words of the participants there was a vividness that was evocative and haunting. Sometime later more positive feelings were expressed when the children, teachers and parents commented about the support received and the heroes. As a means of acceptance and being able to cope, it was noted that the spirituality of the people in terms of religious beliefs and wider cultural values and practises facilitated acceptance and understanding.

Overall, the data collected indicated the participants were able to convincingly communicate their feelings, probably more so than via a solely verbal mode. There is evidence in the evocative responses that meanings, feelings and the self were encountered when thinking about the tsunami and its effects and this provided an opportunity for recovery. The different forms of expression gave insight into the perceptions of the children with clarity and the identified themes indicated a community of experience gradually leading to healing and growth.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the research study was to ascertain the outcomes of an art's as therapy programme designed to facilitate students' feelings and thoughts about the tsunami. Another objective was to gather the students' perceptions of the value of the programme. It was intended to be a therapeutic experience for the students to facilitate their healing. The findings indicated that the children communicated their feelings and thoughts most poignantly and a growth from distress to coping to planning for the future emerged. Most of the feedback from the students revealed a satisfaction with the programme and urged the sustainability of it. These findings are important because they indicate the value of the intervention to individuals and being a group

activity it provided a relatively easy means of support and easing of the trauma.

A number of themes emerged from the individual arts outputs and group activities—death, fear, environmental destruction, heroes and support, the importance of spirituality and moving forward, and these highlighted the growth of the students towards acceptance. These findings were remarkably consistent with the results of studies (Chilcote 2007; Parr 2055) with similar trauma. As in the other interventions, the emphasis upon the cultural context aided the recovery; there was an emphasis upon group sharing and support (as in fono), it quickly became a community involved programme of support and healing and had an emphasis upon the role of spirituality to understand and sustain coping responses. The strength and resilience of the culture are indeed important values as is the nature of the recovery attempt during disaster times (Varghese 2010), the locally designed expressive arts programme promoted these values to assist recovery.

The community became involved in the programme observing, participating and contributing to it. It was a catharsis for them too as they assisted their children to deal with the tragedy. It was cathartic in that the programme (via the drawings, discussions, etc) provided an opportunity for release of the children's emotions and also enabled many community members who participated to come to terms and help them cope with the tragic events. In many senses it was a re-living of the terror but in a safe place and thereby enabling a pathway for over-coming the terror. Furthermore, in a very practical sense and, as noted by Huss, Kaufman, Avgar and Shukre (2015), the arts can act as a vehicle for community building after a disaster—it appears that the community in Aleipata soon realised the potential of the programme beyond assisting the children. It became a programme that was readily accepted and provided a very cost-effective intervention in terms of numbers and resources for the community helping with the overall reconstruction. In a community where support agencies are somewhat minimal and hampered by lack of personnel, material and financial resources, a local venture that understood the cultural imperatives was particularly prized and implementation was requested in other areas. In essence therefore, the significance of the programme can be understood better if it was assumed that it occurred in a context whereby the major therapy for resolution of the tragic events was likely to be time-healing (in other words time would heal the loss, suffering, etc). The expressive arts programme became a means of providing adjunctive therapeutic value maximising healing effectiveness.

Interestingly, not all children responded positively to the programme despite growth of understanding and healing being apparent in most of the children. A few even found it aversive and wouldn't participate if it was repeated. Because of the nature of the event and the consequent rekindling of the experiences via the arts it is probable that some of these children constantly associated it with the horror and despair of the tsunami and this impacted upon their attitudes. Some indicated that it

was difficult to draw (etc.) and this may have also influenced attitudes. Many however noted their participation as an opportunity to express their views and communicate their feelings.

There are a number of study limitations. The children chose to share their stories but it is unknown if they shared all that was important—perhaps it was too painful or personal. The programme facilitators promoted support for the children to present valid feelings and communications but it was unknown to what extent this ensured high level of findings. However, the data collected was convincing evidence to meet the objectives of the study and therefore provide confidence in the findings. The collection of descriptive data was limited (although useful) and it only gave an aspect of the participants' value of the programme and its components. However, it is important to note that it was a study that sought interpretation of findings and description of outcomes, not one that was evaluative. Another important issue is that the study does not provide data on participants' perception of the measurable impact of improvement—the arts outcomes are sufficient evidence but further investigation would have been needed to gauge healing improvement levels.

A number of recommendations arise from this study relating to future research agendas. There is the need for additional research and in particular quantitative studies are needed—to assess reliability of programmes and identify which strategies/arts are more favoured/effective along with identification of important contextual issues. Nevertheless, more in-depth qualitative studies are also necessary to build more understanding of the use of arts in a therapeutic manner. Another important recommendation is for recognition to be given to such programmes and to ensure that a readiness of response is available soon after trauma occurs in a community. A planned programme with resources is a necessity.

This case study is an example of expressive arts as therapy and has highlighted the value of an adjunctive psychotherapeutic approach in a community devastated by a natural trauma. It provides evidence of the utility of the arts as a psychological health promoting tool and one that can readily be implemented. It was a culturally indexed programme that provided a natural process for expression of feelings, reconciliation of anger and sadness, positive growth and understanding for the future. The findings indicated specific therapeutic values of an expressive arts programme for the children and community. Furthermore, the study adds to the growing international literature as well as further inquiry into public policy with the growing rate of natural disasters in the Pacific.

Expressive art therapy integrates all of the arts in a safe, non-judgmental setting to facilitate personal growth and healing. To use the arts expressively means going into our inner realms to discover feelings and to express them through visual art, movement, sound, writing or drama. This process fosters release, self-understanding, insight and awakens creativity and transpersonal states of consciousness. (Rogers 2013)

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