

The Expressive Therapies Groupwork Program:

Innerspace

Background Notes and Evidence Base

Program Created by Dr Mark Pearson

Expressive Therapies Australia

Innerspace uses creative arts-based expressive therapies (ET) activities (Malchiodi, 2005; Pearson, 2003, 2011; Pearson & Wilson, 2008, 2009), within a multiple intelligence based groupwork program, to enhance wellbeing outcomes for children.

Innerspace is an eight-session groupwork program, devised and trialled in Australia by Dr Mark Pearson in 2006, and has been used in schools, social welfare agencies, in private counselling practices and in hospitals along the east coast of Australia and in New Zealand. This program has been designed to be facilitated by counsellors, educators, social workers, psychologists and chaplains.

Innerspace has been developed for two age groups: **Level One for students 7 to 9 years**, and **Level Two for use with students 10 to 14 years** of age. The target group for participation in the program are students who have been identified by staff within a school as exhibiting early signs of challenge with emotional difficulties and/or behavioural regulation. The program has been developed with a specific focus on enhancing psychological wellbeing and emotional literacy through the use of Expressive Therapies (ET) and emotional literacy activities conducted in a group setting. The program is often used with students identified as being challenged with emotional or behavioural difficulties.

Innerspace has been shown to contribute to increases in emotional literacy, decreases in overall student difficulties, and increases in student prosocial behaviour (Zigterman, 2010). *Innerspace* combines behaviour management, emotional literacy and therapeutic strategies into a creative and fun eight-week program.

Background to *Innerspace*

Behaviour management continues to provide a challenge for educators (Baker, Lang & O'Reilly, 2009; Carter, Stephenson & Clayton, 2008). Students with emotional disturbances are one of the most under-identified and under-treated sub-populations (Reddy & Richardson, 2006).

The creator of *Innerspace* has training and experience in several professional fields that are drawn together in the program: education, behaviour management, group facilitation, ET and counselling. This combination of training and experience in education and ET, brings a new framework in developing innovative ways to help students process emotional difficulties, reflect on behaviour, improve communication, and gain self-awareness skills. *Innerspace* was developed in response to interest, requests and suggestions from counsellors working in schools. Outcomes of the use of ET will be highly relevant for educational counsellors, psychologists, behaviour management staff, pastoral care workers and educators working to support students in schools.

The two *Innerspace* programs were developed in Australia with the support of two teams of advisors, in Queensland and Victoria. The teams all worked in schools, agencies or private practice in the areas of special education, behaviour management, counselling, art therapy or as Guidance Officers. The author would like to thank these groups for their generous input and enthusiasm for researching the program's effectiveness.

Innerspace is a groupwork program consisting of 8 sessions (usually between sixty and ninety minutes), with the overall aim of promoting psychological wellbeing, emotional literacy, and developing emotional intelligence, resilience, behaviour change and confidence in students. The program utilises reflective, expressive arts activities, which can enhance self-awareness and communication (Tereba, 1999; Thomas & Mulvey, 2008) and contribute to the resolution of emotional problems (McNiff, 2004; Pearson, 2003; Rogers, 1993). The program also provides a context for peer-group rapport-building, thereby improving positive social relationships (Turner, 1999), which in turn contribute to overall wellbeing (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999; Ryff, 1989).

The program incorporates multiple intelligences (MI) theory (Gardner, 2006) and utilises the practical activities of ET (Pearson, 2003; Pearson & Wilson, 2009) for providing support for student wellbeing. The program can be used to support students exhibiting early signs of emotional and behavioural difficulties, such as being affected by loss, those at risk of experiencing depression, those displaying interactional difficulties, who are withdrawn, acting out, displaying low self-image, or exhibiting academic avoidance (Pearson, 2003).

There are a number of theoretical frameworks that inform the way ET is applied within *Innerspace*. These include links between Gardner's (1993) theory of multiple intelligence in education and its application to counselling (Booth & O'Brien, 2008; O'Brien & Burnett, 2000; Pearson, 2011).

The program incorporates a range of skills-building personal development activities, drawn from ET, such as: expressive writing, use of emotional literacy tools, emotional mapping, use of music, bioenergetics, role-play, relaxation, self-esteem exercises, visualisation and self-discovery worksheets. Each of these draws on and enacts several of the intelligences - or areas of cognitive ability - as identified by Gardner (1993), enabling multiple ways for students to participate, communicate and gain self-understanding. The utilisation of MI activities attracts and engages student interest and abilities, throughout the sessions. These techniques have proved to be useful in supporting individual students to process emotional difficulties that may be impacting on behaviour, attention, social connectedness and self-worth (O'Brien & Burnett, 2000; Pearson, 2003; Rogers, 1993; Tereba, 1999) and have been successfully applied in the counselling of adult clients (Pearson, O'Brien & Bulsara, 2015).

The literature on groupwork, group leadership and group facilitation has formed a background to the way facilitators are trained to interact with students when conducting the program (e.g., Barletta & Fuller, 2002; Dong, Jung & Sosik, 2002; Wing, 1990). Facilitator relational style has been informed by the counselling and psychotherapy outcome research, indicating the value of relationships as a core ingredient in successful outcomes (e.g., Bachelor & Horvath, 1999; Duncan & Miller, 2006; Lambert, 1992). The constructs of well-being, emotional literacy, emotional intelligence and resilience are at the core of the program aims.

While this program does not claim to provide therapy, it develops emotional literacy skills, exercises emotional intelligence, and provides an opportunity for students to experience the benefit of close peer bonds. In other words, students can experience empathic connection as they would within a counselling session. The benefits of an educational approach using MI-based activities, is combined with the experience of close social and emotional connections; identified in the therapeutic literature to be crucial to the change process (Lambert, 1992). Furthermore, the ET inspired activities enhance participants self-awareness and ability to identify and share their concerns.

Research on *Innerspace*

Zigterman (2010) in her University of Southern Queensland psychology research, gathered teacher and student self-reported measures to study the effectiveness of *Innerspace* (Level Two) on student emotional literacy, overall difficulties, and behaviour. The program was implemented for two groups, with a total of twelve students (aged 8 to 11) in a small regional Queensland state school.

The measures used consisted of teacher reports of the participants' overall difficulties and prosocial behaviour, collected using the *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire* (Goodman, 2001) and measures of emotional literacy using both students' self report and teacher report on the *Emotional Literacy Assessment and Intervention Checklist* (Faupel, 2003). All measures were given twice before, and twice after participation in the program. While this study gathered data from a small group of students (12), the results are promising.

Emotional literacy levels of students showed a significant positive change when the post results were compared with pre-program results. There was a large effect after the program had been implemented in the increase of emotional literacy.

The total difficulties levels of students also showed a significant change, with a decrease in the reported level of total difficulties after the program. Teacher perceptions of problem behaviour, as measured by the SDQ total difficulties, declined after students participated in *Innerspace*. The prosocial behaviour levels of students showed significant change, with a large effect after the program in the direction of increased prosocial behaviour.

Zigtermann (2010) reports that the relaxed environment and socially supportive situation within a regularly meeting small group, may have met needs for love and belonging, safety and self esteem that, in turn, enhanced students' ability to demonstrate "scholarly social behaviour". This was observed and positively evaluated by their teachers.

The use of Expressive Therapies

The style of ET used as a basis for *Innerspace* is a synthesis of client-centred expressive counselling principles, modalities and activities for supporting counselling clients, based on creative arts therapies; approaches to counselling and psychotherapy that utilise art, music, writing, drama, movement, play, visualisation and relaxation.

This style of ET has been developed in Australia since 1987 (Pearson, 1997, 2004; Pearson & Nolan, 1991, 2004; Pearson & Wilson, 2001, 2008, 2009). ET aims to support positive changes in behaviour, beliefs and attitudes, and to improve both the self-relationship and relationships with others, through catalysing emotional resolution (Pearson & Wilson, 2001).

Some of the underlying theoretical frameworks and modalities of ET have emerged from Analytic Psychology (Jung, 1964; Sidoli & Davies, 1988), sandplay therapy (Kalff, 2003; Mitchell & Friedman, 1994; Pearson & Wilson, 2001), Gestalt Therapy (Oaklander, 1988; Perls, 1969), bioenergetic therapy (Lowen, 1975; Lowen & Lowen, 2003) and transpersonal psychology (Grof,

1988, 2000). ET with young clients also has close parallels with play therapy (Axline, 1964, 1989; Landreth, 1987, 1991), psychodynamic counselling (Jacobs, 1988) and Humanistic Psychology (Rogers, 1951).

There are many reports on the positive impact of using art and drawing as part of therapy (e.g. Henley, 1999; McNiff, 1992, 2004; Malchiodi, 2005; Oster & Montgomery, 1996; Pearson, 2003; St Clair Pond, 1998). Difficult behaviour can be channelled and transformed into socially constructive forms of self-regulation through supported creative activities (Henley, 1999). ET has been used successfully in a school for working through loss and grief (Rogers, 1993; Tereba, 1999). The use of imagery has been shown to be highly effective in helping people change in positive ways (Hass-Cohen & Carr, 2008; Lazarus, 1982; McNiff, 1992, 2004; Rogers, 1993; Skovholt, Morgan & Negron-Cunningham, 1989; Wolpe, 1958). Emotional resolution can be enhanced by accessing, symbolising and externalising internal conflicts so they can be recognised and worked with, through a range of expressive modalities (Malchiodi, 2005; McNiff, 2004; Pearson & Wilson, 2009).

Emotional literacy and emotional intelligence

The word 'literacy' is employed in a wide variety of contexts. It is used in relation to the ability to read and write at a conventionally accepted level, and also relates to acquiring skill in a particular subject or area of activity – such as health literacy (Nutbeam, 2000), digital literacy (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004), electronic literacy (Bigelow & Holmes, 1986). Reading literacy is a social achievement (Scribner, 1984), "individual literacy is relative to social literacy" (p. 7). It seems the learning of emotional literacy (EL) is also largely social, hence a groupwork program may provide ideal conditions for its development.

EL is defined as "the ability to recognise, understand, handle, and appropriately express emotions" (Sharp, 2001, p. 1), and is generally the term used for the application of, and facility with, emotional intelligence (EI) in an educational setting. Some of the literature on EL indicates that it has been researched in relation to a whole-school application (Haddon, Goodman, Park & Crick, 2005; Sharp, 2000), in individual interventions (Faupel, 2003), and as a core ingredient in generating positive outcomes from school programs (Carnwell & Baker, 2007; Zigtermann, 2010).

The literature on EI is fast growing, controversial and involves several separately evolving positions. There is a genealogy to the development of the EI construct, for example Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligence had been applied in the field of education well before the two main groups of EI theorists emerged. One position is reported by Salovey, Mayer and

colleagues (1990, 1995, 1997) who hypothesised EI as a four-branch ability model comprising perception, assimilation, understanding, and regulation of emotions. The other leading position evolved from the work of Bar-On (2000) who describes EI as a cross-section of interconnected competencies and skills that contribute to intelligent behaviour. Mayer, Roberts and Barsade (2008) attempt to draw these threads together by suggesting an integrative model of EI, that includes the core elements of both positions.

There have been swift developments in validation of the EI construct, including various testing materials, and applications to education, the work place, relationships, health, and beyond. The development of the EI construct is relevant to the application and assessment of ET within *Innerspace*.

The theory of multiple intelligences

In 1983 Harvard researcher, Howard Gardner first described his original seven-intelligence MI theory. MI theory quickly became instrumental in school curriculum planning, and widely adopted in the field of education. Gardner deliberately used the term 'intelligence' to identify what could also be referred to as 'faculties' or 'gifts', and has stated that he is also willing to call them 'talents' or 'abilities' (Visser, Ashton & Vernon, 2006).

Currently MI theory delineates 8 distinct – possibly 9 – intelligences, each one representing a different way that people can reflect, communicate and learn. The intelligences can be summarised (Nolen, 2003) as verbal linguistic (strong ability to use words), mathematical logical (ability with deductive reasoning), visual spatial (ability to use images and graphic designs), musical rhythmic (ability to express through music and rhythm), bodily kinaesthetic (ability with movement and use of the body), intrapersonal (awareness of internal moods and thoughts - also termed by others emotional intelligence [e.g. Mayer & Salovey, 1995]), interpersonal (ability to learn and express through relating to others), and naturalist environmental (affinity with nature and living things). Additionally, Gardner (1999) proposed an existential intelligence (being concerned with reflection on transcendental concerns, such as the significance of life or the meaning of death).

Students draw on a number of information-processing devices in order to make meaning of the world around them (O'Brien & Burnett, 2000). The implications for MI theory applied to counselling with children has been described by Booth and O'Brien (2008), who recommend, particularly when counselling within an educational setting, drawing on a combination of the intelligences - through ET - with which students display more facility. MI theory in counselling adults has been successfully applied and researched by Pearson, O'Brien and Bulsara (2015).

Gardner (2006) argues against a one-dimensional or uniform view of intelligence, in favour of a pluralistic view, that recognises that people have different cognitive strengths and contrasting cognitive styles. Although Gardner describes western education as putting the linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences on a pedestal, he is emphatic that all intelligences have an equal claim to priority.

School wellbeing programs

An increasing number of children exhibit emotional and behavioural difficulties affecting their learning at school (Carnwell & Baker, 2007). From a review of the literature, it seems that established student support programs are primarily designed to teach emotional and cognitive skills, and have adapted a cognitive behavioural approach (e.g., *Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies*, 2009; *Seasons for Growth*, 2009). Group counselling in schools is a powerful and valuable experience for students (Hayes, 2001). Hayes describes the way group counselling can develop social skills, help students practice behaviours with their peers, and receive feedback from peers. In reviewing a range of group counselling programs offered in schools, she notes that many are behaviourally and academically focused, and that some of these may fail to address basic social skills and coping skills deficits. From a counsellor's perspective, emotional development and psychological change would be highlighted in a program, dealing with underlying issues that impact on behaviour and learning.

Creative workshops in the classroom can have a beneficial effect on the self-esteem and symptoms of immigrants and refugee children from a wide range of cultural backgrounds (Rousseau, Drapeau, Lacroix, Bagilishya, & Heusch, 2005). Participation in expressive workshops helped students create a meaningful personal world and strengthen the link between the child on the group (Rousseau et al., 2005). Creative workshops also helped transform the teacher's perception of students, placing an emphasis on strength and resilience. An outcome of the Rousseau et al. study showed that children in the experimental group, using creative activities, reported lower mental-health symptoms and had higher feelings of popularity and satisfaction.

Reddy and Richardson (2006) explored several school-based programs aimed at helping students work through emotional disturbance. They point out that children with emotional disturbance are one of the most under-identified and under-treated subpopulations and these children often miss out on treatment and support. Reddy and Richardson recommend programs that help children gain a feeling of belonging, connection, and a sense of safety, and that these can profoundly influence both short-term and long-term success for children with emotional disturbances.

Facilitator skills and competence

The literature on the core constructs utilised in therapy and behaviour management programs (Porter, 1996) reveals a recurring theme of the high correlation between the development of positive relationships and outcomes of increased EI and resilience (e.g., Elias, et al., 1997; Hall, Geher & Brackett, 2004; Mayer & Salovey, 1995; Wong & Law, 2002). In addition, the neuroscience and psychotherapeutic literature also shows increased effectiveness in therapy and higher neuro-plasticity (leading to the possibility of change) when positive relationships, or alliances, are present (e.g., Barletta & Fuller, 2002; Schore, 2002; Siegel, 1999; Wright, 2000). Consequently, school programs can be strengthened through an increased focus on building inter-personal and intra-personal relationships.

A key ingredient for providing effective groupwork activities, facilitation, and supporting change, is positive relationships (Elias, et al., 1997; Hall, Geher & Brackett, 2004; Mayer & Salovey, 1995; Wong & Law, 2002). Consequently, a focus on developing empathic relationships as a part of the preparation of program facilitators for *Innerspace* is highlighted. In the *Innerspace Facilitator Training*, development of leadership qualities (Wong & Law, 2002; Wright, 2000), and facilitator social and emotional competence (Lopes, et al., 2004) are focused on. These areas are applied through experiential training using the ET activities that make up the *Innerspace* action.

Individuals who can manage their own distress, when exposed to a person who is suffering distress, are more likely to show empathy and compassion (Eisenberg et al., 1989). Socially and emotionally competent teachers are characterised as having high self-awareness (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009); they recognise their emotions, their emotional patterns, and know how to use and generate positive emotions. Jennings and Greenberg emphasise the need to support school staff to become more socially aware, become aware of the way their emotional expressions affect others, to develop culturally sensitive approaches and respect different perspectives. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) remark that teachers rarely receive, and are not required to undertake, training in social and emotional development in childhood. They conclude that to develop a prosocial classroom teacher's own social and emotional competence and well-being will be an essential ingredient. Training in the facilitation of *Innerspace* may contribute to this.

Way back in the 1970s and 1980s, when Western group therapy was in development, Yalom (1975) identified four leadership functions that have direct relationship to outcomes of growth-oriented group work. He identified caring as an essential element of successful group leadership, along with meaning attribution (involving explaining, clarifying and providing a clear

cognitive framework); emotional stimulation (involving challenging, risk taking, self-disclosure and activity); and a leader's executive functions (involving: structuring, developing norms and suggesting procedures).

Effective group counsellors were characterised as having a strong and separate identity, which enables them to have a more integrative and interactive role (Fuhriman & Burlingame, 1990). These facilitators were seen as being more egalitarian, trustworthy, and humorous. Group process factors of nurturance and support play an important role in outcome (Brammer, 1993), and least effective leaders were identified as those with either a strong, confrontative style or a pronounced laissez-faire, low-key style (Yalom, Lieberman & Miles, 1971).

Training to facilitate *Innerspace*

Expressive Therapies Australia (www.expressivetherapies.com.au) offers the *Innerspace Facilitator Training* around Australia. Completion of this three-day training provides professionals with a license to use the program and make copies of program material. The program material includes: Facilitator Guide, Student Workbook, Parent Information Sheets, a Program Evaluation Form, and student Completion Certificate templates. The three-day trainings are available for both levels of *Innerspace*, conducted by the program creator.

Innerspace facilitator training programs have also been provided for a number of welfare agencies, hospitals and state education departments, and *Innerspace* facilitator training can be provided as an inservice program.

For details of facilitator programs and other Expressive Therapies professional extension courses contact: Mark Pearson – Co-director of the Expressive Therapies Australia
Phone +61 419 492 713 or mark@expressivetherapies.au

I just thought I would drop you a brief line to let you know that for a while now I have been using activities from ***Innerspace*** across the school from Prep children to year 7. It is remarkable the genuine hunger that the majority of children display for this type of communication and process. After working with a year 6 class over a 6-8 week period, which is made up of a number of children with challenging behaviours, how engaged the group became over that time and the extent to which they shared their processes with the class. What is obvious is the need for this type of work/philosophy with a whole school approach.

– Behaviour Support Consultant, Education Queensland

Comments from Participants about the *Innerspace Facilitator Program*

The course was very helpful. I like the way it was presented. It is an excellent program to use with children. I liked its flexibility. – Peter Shaw, Classroom Teacher, GYMPIE, Queensland

The trainer had a relaxed manner, gave us time to participate, but also kept the group going. The Facilitator's Guide was very clear and the Student Workbook well set out. There is a great need for this! - Kerri Keppel, Visiting Special Education Teacher, QUEENSLAND

The trainer had a lovely presentation style. I feel inspired ... perhaps I need to change my job to fit in more expressive therapy work in my day and my clients' lives.

- Sue Todman, school counsellor

I am excited to be able to take this program back to my school and practice it with confidence engendered to me from Mark's experience. - Julie Reiher, Chaplain, MELBOURNE.

The course was thought-provoking and motivating. I can see relevance to my work in the classroom and am eager to begin with my students. The program had good progression and flowed easily. – Debby Garrett, Primary Teacher, GYMPIE.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time in the program. Creating that "Innerspace" for children who have difficult lives is important. Schools need this to offer hope to students.

- Intha Chetty - Literacy Teacher - Special Ed, MELBOURNE.

Prior to doing this workshop I was aware of some of the techniques – music, drawing, relaxation, visualisation, etc. – this program has put them all together. Thank you.

– Bernice Webster, Advisory Visiting Teacher, QUEENSLAND

I would just like to thank you Mark for sharing your expertise with us. There is such a huge need for children in our schools in today's society, to be able to get in touch with their emotions and become resilient. This is a great tool to help empower the children. I can't wait to try this out with my special ed. kids. – Lynette Walsh, Head of Special Education, GYMPIE

This course helps with personal reflectiveness. It confirmed a lot of what I believe helps kids and that in education we need to incorporate these expressions of inner creativity.

– Josephine Frost, Learning Support Teacher, GYMPIE

I thoroughly enjoyed my time in the program. Creating that "Innerspace" for children who have difficult lives is important. Schools need this to offer hope to students.

- Intha Chetty - Literacy Teacher - Special Ed, MELBOURNE.

This course was extremely beneficial and enlightening for me. The workbook was very clear.

- Michelle Beirouti, Psychologist, MELBOURNE

I feel empowered by this course and inspired to use it in my practises. It was great therapy for me. I really appreciated Mark's calm, respectful delivery. - Sally Johnston, Guidance Officer, Queensland