

*Celebrating 20 Years of NPO Tiempo Iberoamericano*

# TIEMPO 4 ALL

Commemorative Edition



特定非営利活動法人 ティエンポ・イベロアメリカーノ

## 設立 20 周年記念誌



ラテン文化センター

ティエンポ

NPO TIEMPO Iberoamericano

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go beyond the obvious examples, the clichés, and the first exotic surprises. This also allows me some poetic license to apply pressure on imagined or expected boundaries.

Intercultural exchange is not necessarily an exchange of information. It can be an exchange of views on the same subject. From this subtle shift and the playful exploration of the differences, the essence of things can emerge. An exchange can deepen in crossing the border halfway to the other side.



## **Around the Table: A Multicultural Joint Art Project**

**Daphna Markman-Zinemanas & Peter W. Roux**

*Haifa University, Israel & Saga University, Japan*

### **Introduction**

The first encounter with someone from a culture foreign to our own is often marked by some uncertainty. Without any earlier experience to inform our interaction, we inevitably tend to draw on whatever knowledge we possess to help us make a connection with one another. Attempts to bridge this cultural gap is a natural social response and is based upon our accumulated internal ‘theories’ that have been built over years. These ‘theories’ include perceptions, emotions, ideas and experiences we’ve had about the foreign culture we are confronted with. Inevitably, and often because of a variety societal influences, the media and our own cultural upbringing, these ideas about other cultures, ‘the foreigner, or ‘the other’, contains generalizations and/or stereotypes about race, ethnicity and cultural traditions that might influence our interaction in less beneficial ways.

Is culture only about the differences it creates? On the contrary. Within this broad, even bewildering diversity, a vital and basic commonality we have always had as humans, is sharing and enjoying our food. How we cultivate, prepare and take pleasure in nourishing ourselves remain central to the psychological development of individuals, families, cultures and societies. Our proposition is that the notion of receiving nourishment can be linked with the beauty of cultural diversity and be expressed through the arts. We present a multi-cultural, group-based, experiential art intervention that uniquely draws on participants’ stories and memories of the meaningful nourishment experiences of participants.

As with long-standing traditions in art therapy, we propose that artistic expression as a non-verbal modality can be applied as a tool to encourage and enhance intimate communication in a multicultural group. Such an intervention may hold unexpected potential for discovering previously unseen commonalities through the emphasis on the cultural traditions, preparation and the enjoyment of nourishment. Through guided imagination exercises and drawings, participants share their experiences, memories and stories about receiving nourishment, thus blending personal and cultural narratives.

Expressing their cultural background from a personal point of view allows them to connect with and learn about other cultures in an experiential manner that also addresses the distance of ‘otherness’ between them. If managed professionally and as a protected interactional space, participants may gain additional, personal therapeutic benefit. The engaging and emotive process that ensues, encourages cross-cultural communication and holds significant potential to lower cultural barriers, decrease stereotyping, thereby improving intercultural relations.

### **Project description**

The intervention typically takes place with participants sitting comfortably around a big table that is covered with a sheet of paper, similar to when families gather for a meal. Participants are directed through a guided imagination exercise to remember meaningful dishes and their relational context connected to their family of origin and significant others. Following the guided imagery, participants are requested to choose the most meaningful dish that symbolizes home for them, and paint or draw it on a plate on the big joint paper. It is possible to add details around the plate. Following this, each participant shares his/her personal and cultural story through describing the sketch on the tablecloth, and the connected memories it evokes.

The other participants react and usually curiously ask for more relevant information, personal as well as cultural, and share their own memories on personal and cultural level. It is remarkable how participants often tend to share relatively intimate information freely and easily, soon resulting in a comfortable closeness around the table. The way we tend to find our place in a group is influenced by the way we found our place in our family of origin and from our cultural heritage. This can be reflected upon and discussed through this group joint art project.



### **Thoughts, observations & discoveries**

Participants tend to share very intimate (sometimes even forgotten) personal family stories connected to the culture of the family of origin in a relatively very short time. One participant was surprised to discover that she did not have any recollections of food eaten at home in the years since her parents' divorce when she was 6 years old, until she was a teenager. The dish she had sketched originates in her country and was prepared for her by her grandmother who was a stable figure for her at that time.

Even though she had left her country of origin many years ago, when she prepares it today, it is important for her to follow her grandmother exact instructions. Gaining this psychological insight during the session came as a very meaningful and positive surprise. The rediscovery of a very fond, personal memory is a great example of how personal and cultural narratives can intertwine to provide nourishment, sustaining us even well into adulthood through the connections of family and cultural heritage.

### **Transgenerational memories & traditions**

The relations between food and the meanings they can convey are often striking if the private habits of families are compared with traditions found in the general culture. Participants often connect the preceding generations to the meaning of food in family life, which is, for some, important to continue through to following generations. One of the participants, a Jewish man born in Chicago, who is settled in Japan and married to a Japanese woman, painted the same matzo ball soup as the workshop facilitator, who was born in Israel and had inherited the recipe for this typical Jewish Passover meal from her mother. Their exchange revealed that his great grandparents immigrated from eastern Europe to the US during WWI, while the facilitator's parents came to Israel after WWII, but from the same regions in Europe. Both families had kept the same tradition in different countries and through this inheritance, allowed these two participants to share, over the sketch of a simple bowl of soup, a sudden, but rich and warm connection across time, nationality and generations.

### **Remembering and mourning**

Two other participants, a mother and her grown-up daughter both sketched meals that were prepared for them by their deceased husband and father. It was beautiful and interesting to note that both of them drew attention to the presence of everyone at the table. One painted the same portion of slices of meat as the number of family

members, while the other added a face for each family member. Both told us about what was unique in their family tradition and how it was connected to their Taiwanese culture. For example, it is uncommon that the father is the main cook. They shared the memories of loss, his absence and the remembered joy they felt through his presence of preparing food for the family.

### **Reflections on professional learning**

This workshop allows for differences and similarities between cultures and individual/family traditions to be explored, yielding rich additional knowledge and opportunities for intercultural learning. Most professionals working in this field consider themselves as liberal and open-minded people, but the truth is that anyone working within a foreign culture can deepen their knowledge, confronting and correcting possible misconceptions and biased ways of thinking originating from his/her own background.

An instructive example during this workshop was the facilitator's very empathic reaction to a young Japanese women's aesthetic sketch of a plate with fish and vegetables. She said that her mother used to prepare it daily for her to eat by herself when she came back from school. On enquiry, she said that she typically still eats alone and does not cook at all. The facilitator empathized with her, saying that it seems very sad. The Japanese girl claimed that she did not feel it was sad, but rather typical of the community in which she was brought up. Other participants explained that Japanese mothers are expected to prepare these meals very early in the morning and that it signified dedication, care and love. This example demonstrates that it is easy to react or judge by looking through the lens of one's own culture and family background, where eating with all family members present might be the expected norm. It therefore remains essential that professionals and educators working in the field of multicultural practice and intercultural learning remain self-reflexive and open to exploration when gaps open up as a result of earlier learning or experience.



## Conclusion

This activity enables participants to express their cultural background from a very personal point of view and the use of art as expressive modality can evoke childhood memories and experiences of nourishment in a powerful manner. This unique process that emanates from around a table allows all participants the opportunity to connect and learn about other cultures in an experiential, immediate and often intimate manner. Artistic expression as a non-verbal activity can function as a bridge between cultures, opening up a very rich opportunity for sharing and working through the personal and the intercultural.

Pointedly, this exploration demonstrates that the habits and traditions we create around food provides much more than mere physical nourishment. Common across cultures, the nourishment we receive through food is also partially encapsulated in the relationships it helps to create and sustain, proving that a simple dish that is passed from parent to child can cross several generations and countries and can continue to sustain anyone in a foreign land.

## For further reading

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## Empowerment through Art in a fishing village in Ghana

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### Preamble

The traditional sugar candies or *kintaro ame*, originally from the Edo period (1603-1868) are made by mixing several colors of sugar dough in cylindrical form in order to be sliced. Wherever it is sliced, the same figure appears. For me, when these figures come into focus, the images connect as a path that signifies the shifts in awareness and expression to bring healing. Similar to the creative nature of the healing process I can see the images, like the *kintaro ame* sweets, reflect in my work. The work is transformative for the creator: while creating, the person is absorbed in the landscapes, becomes part of the artwork, and is changed by the work as a result of seeing it from different perspectives. This possibility of interaction between the inner and outer world – to be part of it, and yet, on the outside – provide new challenges to the outcomes when communication and culture are present in the process.

I have spent about 25 years researching and creating art for therapy and healing, exploring the close relationship between art and healing. The years that have preceded the Ghana project takes me back to my first art education project in a child care center and reminds me of the empowering element of art when used in a therapeutic context. Art and play are both creative acts. Through playing, a person – whether adult or child – can be creative and involve the unique essence of his/her personality. In the words of the famous child psychoanalyst, Donald Winnicott (1896-1971): ... 'it is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self.'