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Anxiety and Alternative Facts: An Arts-Based Critical Social Improvisation Project

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Presentation Proposal for Community of Scholars Day

Title of Presentation:

Anxiety and Alternative Facts: An Arts-Based Critical Social Improvisation Project

Abstract:

According to Grayson and Meilman (2011) the stakes are too high in current campus culture to not acknowledge the social roots of mental health issues such as anxiety, and concerns of students as related to campus safety. This arts-based, music performance project responded to concerns on campus from recent political and social events. More specifically, it aimed to explore the concept of “alternative facts” and how this idea plays with the collective concepts of truth and falsifications. It explored applications of clinical improvisation and the concept of collective anxiety as a social phenomenon expressed through arts including music, dance, and visual arts. The music was created through several ‘improvisation labs’ that involved music therapy graduate students. Musical components from those sessions were agreed upon and other musical moments were added to create a composition which would be performed to the public. Audience members, including administrators, and various community stakeholders, were then asked to record their visceral reactions to the performance and gave anonymous feedback. The performance was part of an on-going larger research project on anxiety and wellness /mental health on campus.

Bibliography

Beck, A. T., Emery, G., & Greenberg, R. L. (1985, 2005). *Anxiety disorders and phobias: a cognitive perspective* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Basic Books.

Stein, H. F. (2004). *Beneath the crust of culture: Psychoanalytic anthropology and the cultural unconscious in American life*. New York: NY: Rodopi B.V.

Wigram, T. (2004). *Improvisation: methods and techniques for music therapy clinicians, educators, and students*. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Description:

This arts-based, music performance project responded to concerns on campus from recent political and social events. It examined the concept of “alternative facts” and how it relates to the collective feelings around truth and falsification. It explored applications of clinical improvisation and the concept of collective anxiety as a social phenomenon expressed through music, dance, and visual art. It was part of an on-going larger research project on anxiety and campus violence.

Names of Presenters:

Dr. Rebecca Zarate – Professor of Music Therapy at Lesley University

Dr. Nancy Beardall – Professor of Dance/Movement Therapy at Lesley University
Brooke Rutstein - Music Therapy Graduate Student at Lesley University
Talaye Zarafshan – Music Therapy Graduate Student at Lesley University

Format:

Workshop, Paper, and/or Performance