

Book review

New developments in expressive arts therapy: The play of poiesis

Edited by Ellen G. Levine and Stephen K. Levine
Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London and Philadelphia, 2017
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Reviewed by Deborah Green

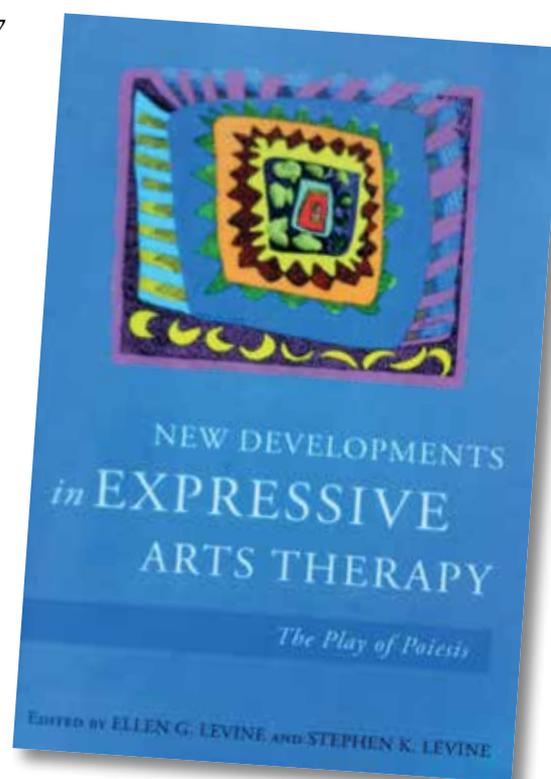
The play of poiesis from the stage to the page – remembering and reviewing the Levines’ poietic presence at the 2017 ACATA/ANZATA Conference and in their latest book.

The transformatory poietic work of Ellen G. Levine and Stephen K. Levine, founding members of the expressive arts therapy movement and the European Graduate School (EGS), came into my world while I was grappling to make sense of my role as arts therapist during the Canterbury earthquakes and their aftermath (2010–12). It was thus with great anticipation that I attended their presentations during the 2017 ACATA/ANZATA Arts Therapy Conference, ‘Gather, Envision, Create’ in Melbourne.

Ellen sets up a large creative surface and, using a range of materials including paint, pastels, and coloured crepe paper, she builds an artwork in response to an emotionally stirring photographic image of an abandoned sandal. She shares her thoughts about her evolving creative process and its emergent meanings in bite-sized chunks every 15 minutes. She doesn’t reference Stephen’s narrative directly yet speaks of being subliminally aware of his words as she creates – and she leaves it open to the audience to make connections between her process and his. This offers us a fascinating enactment of their principle of decentring – where arts



Figure 1: The Levines’ keynote address. 2017, photo by Deborah Green.



creation steps away from direct engagement with the issue at hand and rather opens space for innovation and fresh insight. While Ellen actively models decentring, Stephen distributes snippets of paper among the audience. On each piece is a word as a prompt, and audience members are invited to call out these words as Stephen speaks. He considers each word and then spontaneously interweaves these ideas, producing an off-the-cuff emergent grounding theory that is, as he frames it, ‘indigenous to arts therapy’. In response to words such as ‘chaos’, ‘improvisation’, ‘modernism’ and ‘play’, his layered musings open glimpses into ways of being with expressive arts therapy that focus on setting aside formulas and dogmas. Rather he calls for us to come fully present to the aesthetic moment, to whimsy and playfulness, surprise and curiosity, to multiplicity and creative emergence, to allowing new order to emerge from the chaos of poietic creation – all of which invites stuckness to shift, and new ways of being and doing to emerge.¹

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