

An Expressive Arts Approach to Therapeutic Puppetry

Course Instructor: Matthew Bernier, MCAT, ATR-BC

Therapeutic puppetry refers to the use of puppetry as an aid in physical, emotional or social healing, remediation, or rehabilitation. It capitalizes on the innate therapeutic value of puppetry arts: puppet making, puppet play, interaction with puppet characters, and observation of specially designed puppet shows. Puppets serve as animated symbols and intermediary objects. Thoughts and feelings are projected onto the puppets and are worked through, allowing for the dramatic release and resolution of emotional conflicts. Puppetry stimulates memory and provides a safe opportunity for creative and imaginative expression of past experiences such as trauma. Puppetry stimulates storytelling, fostering language development and providing diagnostic information. Puppetry offers the opportunity for patients, clients or students to explore roles and to express and explore uncomfortable feelings, aggression, and relationship conflicts with limited anxiety, fear, and guilt. In clinical applications, therapeutic puppetry combines techniques and principles from art therapy, play therapy, expressive arts, drama therapy, psychodrama, devised and collaborative theatre, and puppet theatre. Puppetry expression can be stimulated by and integrated with other expressive arts such as music, poetry, visual arts, and dance/movement. Participation in community arts puppetry performance experiences can be therapeutic for the participants and the community audiences.

This 5-day course will include:

- **History and theory of therapeutic puppetry:** and examples of applications in medical, mental health, therapeutic school, and other human services settings and applications for individuals, groups, families, and social action in the community. Overview of the psychological rationale and theoretical principles of therapeutic puppetry.
- **Relevant psychological and developmental theory:** emphasis will be on the cognitive, emotional, imaginal, and behavioral experience and the therapeutic value of puppet building and puppet play as implied by:
 - The Expressive Therapies Continuum (Hinz, 2009; Kagin & Lusebrink, 1978; Lusebrink, 1990)
 - Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983/1993)
 - The benefits and of puppet play in child development
 - Group process and roles
 - Psychotherapy theoretical approaches
 - Intermodal Expressive Arts (Knill, Barba, Fuchs, 2004)
- **Theories of applied puppetry** and examples of applications in medical, mental health, schools, and other human services settings and applications for individuals, groups, families, and social action in the community.
- **Dramaturgy and Aesthetics of Therapeutic Puppet Theatre:** dramaturgical/theatrical considerations for devising therapeutic puppet shows.

- **Puppetry Types:** discussion and demonstration of puppet types and styles of puppetry recommended for therapeutic work: table-top figures, hand, mouth, and rod puppets (i.e. sock, box, bag, bottle), object puppetry, shadow puppetry, and toy theatre.
- **Puppet Building:** techniques for using a variety of processes and materials to make several types of puppets that can be used effectively in therapy including: table-top figures, sock puppets, box puppets, rod puppets, shadow puppets, and object puppetry characters.
- **Interactive Therapeutic Puppetry Techniques:** practical experiences with several techniques such as
 - Client-Directed Puppet Play
 - Puppet Playback Theatre
 - Mutual Storytelling Technique/Dramatized Storytelling
 - Toy Theatre
 - Object Puppetry Storytelling
 - Puppetry and other Expressive Arts (art, drama, music, poetry, movement)
 - Collaborative and devised theatre

Target Audience & Disclaimer: This course is suitable for therapists and counselors and graduate students of these disciplines who are interested in integrating therapeutic puppetry into their practice. Puppeteers with limited education in psychology may find some of the academic content more challenging. All participants should abide by the ethics and best practices of their disciplines pertaining to scope of practice, education standards, and credentialing.

Recommended Reading:

Aronoff, M. (Winter, 1997). Therapy. *The Puppetry Journal*, p. 25.

Astell-Burt, C. (1981, 2001). *I am the story: The art of puppetry in education and therapy*. London, UK: Souvenir Press.

Bernier, M. (1983). *Puppetry as an art therapy technique with emotionally disturbed children*. Unpublished master's thesis, Hahnemann University, Philadelphia, PA.

Bernier, M. & O'Hare, J. (Eds.) (2005). *Puppetry in education and therapy: Unlocking doors to the mind and heart*. Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse.

Gendler, M. (1986). Group puppetry with school-age children: Rationale, procedure and therapeutic implications. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 13, 45-52.

Irwin, E. & Shapiro, M. (1975). Puppetry as a diagnostic and therapeutic technique. In I. Jakab (Ed.). *Psychiatry and art*. (4). New York, NY: S. Karger.

Irwin, E., Rubin, J., & Shapiro, M. (1975). Art and drama: Partners in therapy. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 29, 107-116.

Knill, P. J., Barba, H. N., & Fuchs, M. N. (2004). *Minstrels of soul: Intermodal expressive therapy, 2nd ed.* Toronto, CA: EGS Press.

Latshaw, G. (1978, 2000). *The complete book of puppetry.* (Previous title: *Puppetry: The ultimate disguise.*). Mineola, NY: Dover.

Rojas-Bermudez, J. (1969). The intermediary object. *Group Psychotherapy*, 22, 149-154.

Matthew Bernier, MCAT, ATR-BC

Matthew Bernier, MCAT, ATR-BC, is a registered, board-certified art therapist. He has been a full-time faculty member of the Eastern Virginia Medical School Graduate Art Therapy Program since 1990 and is an Associate Professor in the School of Health Professions and the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences.

In 1980, he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology with a minor in theatre arts from Kean University in Union, New Jersey. He earned his Master of Creative Arts in Therapy degree in 1983 from Hahnemann University in Philadelphia where he completed his master's thesis, *Puppetry as an Art Therapy Technique with Emotionally Disturbed Children.*

He has art therapy experience with children, adolescents, adults, and families, especially those who have experienced domestic violence, physical abuse, and/or sexual abuse. He has many years of experience providing clinical supervision to art therapy student interns as well as professional creative arts therapists and other clinicians.

His academic interests and teaching experience include: the potentials of art processes and materials in art psychotherapy; theoretical approaches of art psychotherapy; symbolism; art history; aesthetics; psychopathology; theories of personality; child and adolescent art psychotherapy skills, including the integration of art and play therapy techniques; expressive arts therapy; and expressive arts and social change. He has served as principal investigator and committee chair for over 50 master's thesis research studies.

He regularly serves on professional committees and boards. He served on the Board of Directors of the American Art Therapy Association (AATA). He served on the AATA Ethics Committee, as the Chair of the AATA Education Programs Approval Board, and as the Disciplinary Action Chair of the Art Therapy Credentials Board. He is a past president of the Virginia Art Therapy Association. He has served as a trustee and the vice president of the Puppeteers of America. He has served multiple terms as president and vice president of the Southeastern Virginia Puppetry Guild.

He has presented internationally in the U.S., Canada, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, and Finland on a variety of topics including art therapy, domestic violence, therapeutic puppetry, and puppetry in education. He has led many workshops on therapeutic puppetry. He has been a member of the creative arts therapists educational performing troupe, MUSE, and has performed “Celebrating the Cycle of Life through Art, Dance, Music, and Poetry” with them many times throughout the U.S.

He has published book and video reviews in professional journals. He is the co-editor of *Puppetry in education and therapy: Unlocking doors to the mind and heart* (2005, Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse).

He is currently working on a PhD in Expressive Arts: Therapy, Education and Social Change at the European Graduate School in Switzerland. His research includes working with ex-offenders through the use of collaborative expressive arts to support desistance from crime.

Matthew Bernier, MCAT, ATR-BC

**Graduate Art Therapy and Counseling Program
Eastern Virginia Medical School
PO Box 1980
Norfolk, VA 23501-1980**

**757-446-5895
berniemg@evms.edu**