



Creative APPROACHES

The official newsletter of DTLA and The Creative Therapies Center

Spring Courses in Focus

Drama Therapy and Narradrama with Imprisoned Persons

This Spring, Kamran Afray, Ph.D, RDT.,NT., and visiting faculty member, Elizabeth Malone Alteet, MA., RDT are teaching a very special workshop on bringing drama therapy practices to prison communities. We asked them a few questions about their experiences.

Can I hear about your history working with imprisoned people?

Kamran Afary: I started in the 1990s, I was working with a group of supporters outside. There was a lot of correspondence going on nationally, it was a period where there was a big movement against the SHU, or the maximum-security housing. There was this really extreme isolation of prisoners. I remember just reading those letters and just feeling a tremendous sense of compassion. The need to be doing something led to that correspondence. I was reading a lot of interesting political writing, I was also doing work with gang members, people who were involved in moving away from criminal activity to more political activism and constructive work

In 2017, my campus at Cal State Los Angeles started a bachelor's degree program in Lancaster prison. I've been teaching courses there since 2017, working with my colleague Elizabeth in creating drama therapy performances, [and] Narradrama performances. Some



Elizabeth Malone Alteet, MA., RDT
Visiting Faculty

of the people we worked with are now leaving. So we're also helping bridge that period of coming back and working through the parole process and becoming citizens again.

Elizabeth Malone: I officially started in 2016. The year before I saw a performance inside of a prison. When I went, in my head, I thought "Okay, there would be this big separation, maybe there will be this big wall between us." But we were right next to each other... and it was so powerful because I've never experienced that, particularly in a maximum-security prison. The humanity that was exchanged just really opened my eyes. I knew that I wanted to go back and be a part of the work. From then on, I've worked with a few different theatre companies as a teaching artist; creating performances inside prisons, and more improvisational work inside men's and women's jail. I got the opportunity through Kamran to co-direct and co-facilitate some more Narradrama-type workshops.

We went in thinking it would just be some classes and workshops, but we ended up with a couple of performances. It was powerful to see the drama therapy training and work carry over into performance. What I had been doing before... was very standard like scenes from Shakespeare or modern plays or self-written work. But this was devised from a Narradrama framework. To see them own that, and then share it with their families was very powerful. It really changed me.

I was an actor- I still act- and director, teacher, educator, and then I pursued drama therapy. Through this work I have found my niche, where I really want to be, which is working with people impacted by incarceration. Not necessarily just people inside correctional facilities, but also people just that are system impacted.

What drew you to this work?

KA: For me, I was always interested in social justice and healing and transformational work. I took the opportunity to combine that with teaching... I think once I came in and I started seeing the actual transformations, and how people were taking the responsibility to create a safe learning environment inside prison. To do that was also transformational for myself. Just getting to know individuals in flesh and blood, who were doing this work from the inside, has been a tremendous draw for me.

EM: My dad was a police officer, and so I think there's something connected to that. I grew up very religious, but in a very strict, fear-based way. There was definitely this

divide between the “good” and the “bad,” and I think I've always been drawn to [the idea] of why are some [people] good? Why are some bad?
Being in a space where people have been labeled as bad, and yet there's just so much goodness flowing from so many people inside. I would say, all of them are, of course, all of us, are capable of [it]. So it's really helped me understand more about the world, and about my own spirituality and faith. I came face to face with the fact that I was taught to think very black and white. It's helped me just open up my world. **Continued on page 8.**

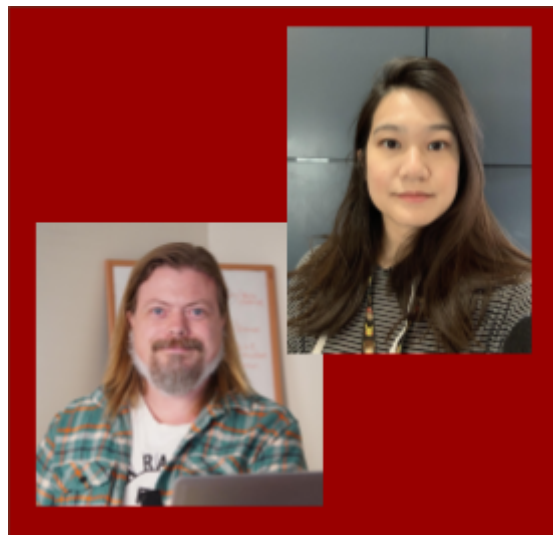
Student Voices

**From the Committed Students' of DTILA:
Linus Phillips and Emily Pham**

What has been a highlight learning experience for you?

LP: Taking class with Pam has been a thrill. Her clear love of the work is infectious. I love how knowledgeable she is of all the kinds of drama therapy and I love getting a chance to witness her skill of conducting the exercises with us in class and seeing how skillfully she can ask follow up questions to help pull out deeper truths.

EP: My biggest highlight is knowing that drama therapy exists! I love the theater arts, and to see that there is a field that exists where I can marry both my passion for mental health and theater arts was extremely exciting for me. Pam was so welcoming in having me be a part of DTILA. I love watching others experiment and conduct their own drama therapeutic exercises. I feel like I learned so much on how to explore clients'



issues with the arts. DTILA courses are so very experiential, so we get a feeling of what drama therapy feels like as the participant and as the facilitator.

What has been your most successful strategy for coping with the challenges of the Covid Pandemic?

LP: I recently fell in love with drama therapy and so I was so happy to discover Pam's class. As a screenwriting teacher and filmmaker I see so many possibilities of using drama therapy techniques to help my students to explore their creativity while navigating any personal issues and or trauma that may come up.

EP: The COVID Pandemic has been an extremely difficult situation, but a couple great things came out of it. One, I began contacting friends more. Friends whom I have not spoken for years or that live in different cities. I also have had more time to dabble in hobbies such as acting, music, watching Netflix, and video games. These hobbies definitely keep me sane in my profession! The Pandemic can cause people to feel disorganized since a lot of the work is being done at home. I organize my tasks through lists and calendars quite often to make sure I don't fall behind and remember what assignments are due since I'm also still in school.

What is one way applying drama therapy has helped you in your line of work?

LP: One of the biggest things I have learned from her is how every creative choice a client makes is revealing. It's allowed me to be more open minded when helping my students.

EP: Talk therapy is extremely helpful, but I love the benefits of drama therapy with its playful creativity that supports participants in feeling less judged and encourages spontaneity and expression. I think drama therapy is an effective strategy especially during the pandemic, since it doesn't have to involve touch or close proximity (there are ways to work around it). Unfortunately, I have not been able to fully employ drama


therapy techniques within my MSW internship placement, but I know I will definitely use them in my practice in the future!

Class Registration Update

The Spring schedule is here. Fill it out, click what classes you are registering and confirm your payment method. If you want to add more classes, just fill out the form again with the classes you want to add. Don't send class payment without registering or we will not know you are in the class. Questions about registration, please email dtilareg@gmail.com. For questions about classes and payment, email Pam Dunne. See you on Zoom!



Upcoming Classes

You can go to the [Drama Therapy Institute of Los Angeles website](#) to view all upcoming classes. Please note: CE's can be earned for CAMFT, APA or NADTA. All classes will be held on Zoom until further notice. Click the green button to register: 

REGISTER NOW

Drama Therapy and Ethics (14 hours)

Dates: March 26, April 9 and 23

Time: 12 pm to 4:45 pm (PST)

Cost: \$338

Facilitator: Pam Dunne, Ph.D, RDT-BCT, NT

Group Psychotherapy

Dates: March 24, March 31, April 1, 7, 14, 21, 28, May 5, 12, 19, 26 and June 2

Time: 5 pm to 7:30 pm (PST)

Cost: \$699

Facilitator: Cynthia Kelvin PsyD, RDT

Sociodrama and Advanced Psychodramatic Techniques (3 units)

Dates: March 13, 20, April 10, May 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, June 5.

Time: 9:30 am-1:30 pm (PST)

Cost: \$699

Facilitator: Pam Dunne, Ph.D., RDT-BCT, NT

Narradrama as a Three Act Play (3 units)

Dates: April 30, May 7, 14, 21, 28, June 4 and 11

Time: 9:30 am to 2 pm (PST)

Cost: \$699

Facilitator: Pam Dunne, Ph.D, RDT-BCT, NT

Additional arranged time at convenience of class members

Introduction to Drama Therapy and Addiction

Date: April 18.

Time: 10:30am-6:00pm (PST) (7 hours-lunch break)

Cost: \$169

Facilitator: Alexis Maron, MA, RDT-BCT, RADT

Drama Therapy with Adolescents

Dates: May 16. 10:30am-6:00pm (7 hours-lunch break)

Cost: \$169

Facilitator: Cynthia Kelvin PsyD, RDT

Drama Therapy for Addiction: Healing the Effects of Trauma

Date: June 6

Time: 10:30 am to 6:00 pm (lunch break) (PST)

Cost: \$169

Facilitator: Alexis Maron, MA, RDT-BCT, RADT

Narradrama Innovative Techniques (14 hours)

Dates: April 18 and 25

Time: 12 pm to 5 pm (PST)

Cost: \$338

Facilitator: Pam Dunne, Ph.D, RDT-BCT, NT

Clinical Uses of Narradrama: Pivotal Moments (7 hours)

Dates: June 12 and 19,

Time: 9:30 am to 1:00 pm (PST)

Instructor: Pam Dunne, Ph.D, RDT/BCT- NT

Required for Narradrama Training

Drama Therapy and Narradrama with Imprisoned Persons

Date: May 30. 10:30 AM to 6:00 PM (7 hours-lunch break)

Time: 10:30 am to 6:00 pm (PST)

Cost: \$169

Elective for Narradrama Training

Facilitator: Kamran Afary, Ph. D, RDT, NT

Facilitator: Elizabeth Malone Alteet, MA. RDT

Music Therapy Class Music Therapy for Creative Arts Therapists

AUG 8 and AUG 15 11:45 to 3:15

Cost: \$169

Psychotherapy Groups

Sign Up [here](#)

Drama Therapy Psychotherapy Group-

Fridays, 9:30AM to 11:30 AM (PST)

Cost: \$244

Facilitator: Alexis Maron, MA, RDT-BCT, RADT

Finding Heart Group-

Mondays: six weeks beginning March 22

Time: 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM (PST)

Cost: \$244

Renda Dionne Madingral, Ph. D

DTILA STARTS NEW FOCUS AREA

The Drama Therapy Institute of Los Angeles will be starting a new emphasis area and introducing new classes to show how to use drama therapy and Narradrama with imprisoned persons, returning citizens and justice impacted individuals in this global crisis of incarceration. These classes will be taught by Kamran Afary and Elizabeth Malone using a Narradrama approach to work both inside prisons and with those in transition out of prison.



Spring Courses in Focus, continued from pg 2...

How does drama therapy and Narradrama training prepare you for this kind of work?

KA: Both embodied and the role exercises, and the projections, and in general in drama therapy are helpful to know how to do this work now. I went in as a communication studies instructor, but I was able to incorporate those kinds of experiential exercises into my courses and make sure that that's part of the class. Narradrama has

this intersection on orientation. I've mentioned restorative justice orientation, that was really helpful too. It's just to allow full development of the stories that people tell about themselves and about the world to have those preferred stories. So there was a lot of preparation in terms of what kind of questions to pose, and what kind of dialogue to do more. Engaging that can help bring that forward.

EM: I think going in as a teaching artist, [and] being a drama therapist has helped me... feel safer. I don't mean physically safer, but emotionally safer in the room. If something comes up, I feel like I know the boundary of what another person or the room might be able to handle.

It's given me more vocabulary, but also more tools to be able to take people deeper without retraumatizing or taking them to a place that won't be received well. When you're going into any space... where people have a lot of complex trauma, having some degree of training in what to do when someone is having a trauma response is important. Even if they're really withdrawn and held back, how to draw them out even more, little by little. I think it's really been helpful.

It was like what I was doing as a theater artist because it's just all about stories, so it just helped me. I always love devising theater, but being able to devise theater that's even more personal, about the person's story and to have these exercises and a framework. With getting to work with Kamran, together we have this shared vocabulary, so we both knew this

language, and had this training. We were even in a lot of the classes together. It was great to just collaborate, and it's so much more fun when you have someone else in the room with you.

What is one personal example that really moved you during your work over the years?

KA: There are so many examples it's really hard to select just one, but I think definitely working with Elizabeth. There was the experience we had of creating first the performance called "Imagine That" and then one called "A Fresh Start." Both were over a period of several weeks, several months of preparing and then having a final performance where people could participate. Those were tremendous experiences and very memorable. I got to see that very little last summer in the middle of the pandemic. I was able to gather some scripts from my students who are taking a course now on performance, and within two weeks some colleagues performed it and broadcasted it for the entire prison. One of the students was able to connect with the Black Lives Matter movement and the uprising after

George Floyd's death. That was really powerful to me, having that opportunity to connect with that.

EM: A few brief ones come to mind. I worked with a gentleman who had been incarcerated as a teenager, just for being an accomplice. He was doing, really, really well inside and had the chance to go forward before the parole board. So, he wrote out a letter or a poem about his experience, and because he did, he got out. He said he used the theater exercises we taught him right before he went before the parole board. All the breathing work, all the language and the speech work. Just to see it translate into someone's real world in a way, that was very important. This was probably the most important meeting of his life up to that point, and he was able to just take that work in there. I was able to continue working with him and be a witness at his court hearing. Just to be more involved, and so I came as a teaching artist, as a theater person, but just seeing that we have so much to offer people even beyond that.

And then, secondly, when working with Kamran, there was an individual who. We had given him a prompt but based on it he wanted to share the story of

losing his two children while inside. One of them was killed, and one of them was hit by a car and died. He was sharing the story willingly, and when he started his voice went really high pitch and we all felt like "oh my gosh is, is he okay?" he started crying and the whole room responded very graciously. Afterward he told us that's the first time he's broken down in 26 years. Then he said that the crime that he was in for was the same one that got his son killed, so he had forgiveness for the person who killed his son, because of the difficult situation that he went through. I'm always struck by that moment of him, breaking down and wanting to share that story with us.

I'm always honored by what I get to be a part of in someone else's life that's so personal and so vulnerable. Sometimes I feel my purpose is to learn other people's stories. To be a part of someone's healing process is such a gift.

Have you faced any hesitation or hostility from the incarcerated individuals to jump into this sort of work?

KA: A lot of the work involves questioning toxic masculine stereotypes. A couple of my students were discussing how they put together a workshop on masks of masculinity... They used the drama therapy exercises as a way of role playing and performing some of these masks. They found that to be really useful to overcome these toxic issues... Of course, not to say that this question has been resolved, but at least I know that the population we work with are open to it. They are interested in exploring more about connections, overcoming some of the associations with trauma and, in particular, misogyny and sexism. Patriarchal attitudes can be really harmful to that.

EM: Absolutely, you find all types of people who are open to things which are not open to them. Depending on where they are at in their process. I remember one guy in a theater class who didn't want to be there, his friend signed him up. And by the end he was wearing this ridiculous dog costume, and panting like a dog, and being so silly. I mean it's a person who's still fully involved in the gang world, he came to rehearsal intoxicated a couple times.

And he's a completely different person than in the yard. Even though he may still be in the toxic prison world, he had this taste of play and of communal silliness and joy, which I would say is not probably promoted on the yard. So, you see all different types of people in their process.

The second thing I'll say is I was teaching a class at a jail, it wasn't a theater class, it was a parenting class, and we wrote on the board all the adjectives that describe the things their father passed down to them. They were all very gracious to their fathers, it was all very positive, but all the things they wrote were about working hard. I asked them, well what's missing on this? Words like, "fun", "love", "nurture", "hugs". They were quick to see this. I said, okay, so in your relationship to your fathers, you're kind of seeing that this is what was handed to you, but what might you want to add? It was cool just seeing the light bulbs go off. Like, "I do want a more well-rounded life for my children than what I experienced emotionally."

How has this work helped to reduce your stigmas towards the prison population? I feel our society really

has a sense of wanting to “other” people who a lot of times have just been dealt a bad card. What would you like those who read this to know about being compassionate and tolerant towards imprisoned persons?

KA: When you're inside and you're seeing people studying together, using the prison yard as a space to teach each other. They're talking about their next research paper and how to be a model for the younger prisoners instead of looking for a gang war. They're actually looking into improving themselves and transforming themselves. So that to me was a learning experience, just to get a sense that we go in there thinking that we're bringing something to them, but after a while we also realize that they helped create the space. They practice it daily in so many ways. In the way they interact with correctional officers and with each other, the way they help create a safer, healthier environment. So, they can be more involved in researching, thinking, writing, and taking this story out to show to others. The ideas of overcoming stigma, of in-working with identities, helping

teach personal skills, listening skills, conflict management, and contract negotiation skills. Those kinds of things are really helpful. You can see that the people taking these classes in the prisons are a lot more open to the ideas as well. I just got a letter from a couple people I taught in one of my classes. They're now the authors of a textbook on interpersonal communication. So, I shared some of the writings with them, and they're starting their new edition of the



Kamran Afray Ph.D., RDT, NT

textbook. They would like to use some of those writings for the next edition. It was exciting to see that their voices are now being incorporated into a textbook for the next generation of students. Thousands of them will be taking these classes on interpersonal communication.

EM: If I had anything to add to that, I'd say to really focus on the stories being shared. Even that little story I told you. Just showing people that it's so different than they would think or imagine. Most people ask, "Well, aren't you scared?" The first time I went in I was a little apprehensive, but I wanted to be there. I was anticipatory, I wasn't scared.

Now, it almost feels wrong to enter like this, because I know they're in such a dark place, and they want out. But now I enter with such excitement and joy to see them. It feels like a reunion every time because I don't get to go all the time. I think that's because there's a deeper level of humanity that is accessed more quickly inside there than anywhere else. I crave that. As soon as you're in there the welcome you receive is kind of over the top, in a way. Like wow, this is the most liked I've ever felt.

I think it's because anytime you put a community of people together who are around each-other 24/7, like in grad school, or college, or camp, and on top of that they've gone through so much together. They have a very special kind of energy that they emit that is really

hard to find anywhere else. I really try to focus on that with people. That's why I try to invite people as much as I can to performances. It's just life changing for the people I have invited, just to go inside once. I wish everyone could see, maybe as part of school curriculum or something, just to visit and see a play or any sort of artistic performance done by people incarcerated. I think it would help so much of society. I think it would change the way in which we do crime and punishment if we could really break that stigma.

Can you talk a little bit more about the class which you will be offering in the spring?

KA: Sure, this is the first time Elizabeth and I are offering this together. It will be a day long class, seven hours long with a lunch break.

The focus will be on how to create a trauma informed drama therapy community of practice. We'll be exploring some of the ways in which we can create a sense of safety and transparency, as well as be more explicit about the values that we embody. We'll look at different ways in

which trauma can affect us and the ways in which we can have healing as well. With the objective that there are some alternative ways in which we can deal with trauma, that there are some narrative exercises that both of us will be able to introduce.

EM: I would just add a small thing that I think will be beneficial for people who, even if you can't see yourself working inside of a correctional facility: most people are going to work with someone who's been impacted by incarceration in some way. I worked at an eating disorder center, and there were people who had experienced incarceration there. So, I think it's important to remember that whatever population you're going into work with, you're going to want some more knowledge or training on what the impact might be on a person, but I think Kamran explained the actual idea.

What further training and classes will you be offering at the institute?

KA: This is an introductory overview session. Future sessions will go more in detail with different aspects of drama and narrative therapy. There's

ways in which we can break it down into witnessing practices, working on problems, saturated stories or thickening the plot of preferred stories. We could have one workshop specifically on narrative questioning, because there's all these different steps in the process. We'll be developing more focus areas in the future.

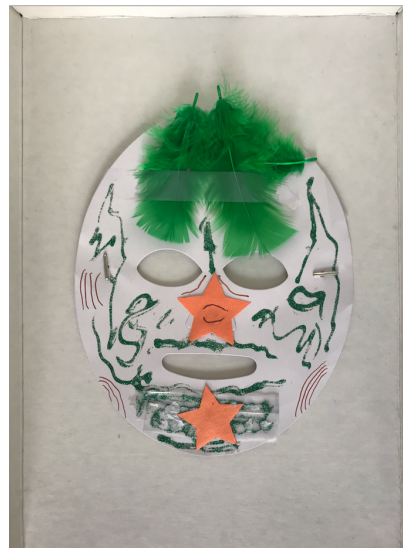
EM: I'm excited, this will be the first time I get to go in as an educator in the Drama Therapy Institute, because that's where I got my training. I definitely hope we can do more classes in the future.

What aspects of Narradrama have the incarcerated people you've worked with been the most responsive to?

KA: I would say the idea that they can develop preferred stories and preferred narrative healing dialogue within themselves and with each other. And the other is to establish new relationships to be able to see themselves in different roles, and to have these witnessing practices with the other cohorts and classmates or invited guests who come to see the performance.

EM: I've noticed having a framework allows them to do more on their own, because we have limited time with them. From this, I know that they have taken it and done some of the exercises on their own. A lot of them have never done any sort of theater-type performance, so just allowing them to realize what it is and what they're capable of. By giving them a framework, they get to do it whenever they choose. There's a group that's form took some of the work, and made a program called CROP: Convicts Reaching Out to People. They would have these youth who came in that did some sort of offense in the community. And they turned some of their ideas into practice, they had the confidence to do that on their own. So I think it's just given them some tools to be able to take their ideas and turn it into a performance to get their point across in a creative way.

KA: That's another thing, one of the groups that we worked with established their own ensemble called 'Ubuntu', which is a South African term for the restorative justice program. So one day when some journalists or



some board members from the Cal-State system we're coming in to interview them, they said they would like to do a performance first before they have the interview, so they were able to create a presentation day with different performances based on that.

I understand both of you are co-editors for a special issue of *Drama Therapy Review*, can you please tell me a bit more about that?

KA: Yes, so we've been working on this for the last two years. We have gathered a collection of interviews with at least 10 drama therapists internationally over the past 40 years. We're so excited about getting them to contribute to this upcoming issue

which will involve some reviews of current literature, different approaches, discussion of different histories of drama therapy, and present day drama therapy. We're presenting current research, mostly qualitative research in performance, expressive arts research as well, so we're the deadline is coming up sometime in at the end of Summer of 2021 with the issue due for publication in Winter of 2022.

EM: I'm currently working on call in for proposals. There'll be a wide range of scholarly work on it, so people can

submit artistic content, scholarly articles, interviews, digital audio, digital content. I'm really excited about this. I believe this is the first time they've done a special edition on our work with the incarcerated population. This should have more consolidated research for people to refer to, and for us to know more about what other people are doing. I think it will be really important for drama therapists to have more of a presence inside correctional facilities. My dream is that there will be jobs that are outright for drama therapists for more system impacted people.

Open Call for Community Voices Series



Would you like an essay or an editorial-style article you have written to be featured in Creative Approaches? If it is related to the Creative Therapies please email dtilareg@gmail.com. We are actively looking for more voices from our community to feature in the newsletter!

Guest Editor: Pietrina Poritzky; Contributing Authors: Pietrina Poritzky, Pam Dunne, Linas Phillips, Emily Phan, Editor: Lauren Seale Fischbacher

Want to be featured or a contributing author? Email Pam Dunne or dtilareg@gmail.com!