**Art-Based Learning Activities From ABMP’s School Issues Forum**

**Visual Dialogues**

* Collages
* Photography
* Painting
* Posters
* Art Objects

**Sample Activity: Poster Projects and Shows**

**Introduction:** Poster projects and shows encourage learners to organize their time effectively, think critically and creatively, and communicate a clear message. Effective posters focus on a single message, act as a source of information, let graphics tell most of the story and serve as effective conversation starters.

**Directions:**

1. Pick a theme for which you want learners to develop posters. Ideas for themes might include:
   1. Massage for Special Populations
   2. Massage and Condition Management
   3. Anatomy, Physiology, and Massage
   4. You Need a Massage!
   5. Massage Fast Forward – Massage in 2020
   6. Massage Making a Difference
   7. Many others
2. Create guidelines for poster submissions. For example, you might stipulate that posters should be 18 x 24 inches in size and submitted with a 150-250 word typed description expressing the inspiration behind the poster.
3. Create judging criteria. If you intend to hold a show and choose the top three posters provide the criteria on which posters will be judged. For example, “Your poster will be judged on originality, clarity and relevance of the poster’s message, and use of graphics.
4. Pick the winners: Ask two or three people to act as judges and provide them with judging criteria. It’s important that judges don’t know which student created which poster.
5. Plan a show. Clear a room at the school, hang the completed posters, and open the “gallery doors” to students in other classes, teachers, the community, friends, and family. Learners stand by their posters to answer questions as participants make the gallery rounds.
6. Display. Place the posters on display at the school for a pre-determined length of time and encourage students, faculty, and staff to leave comments in a designated box.
7. Process: Plan classroom time to process the poster project in a classroom discussion about the event.

**Sample Activity: Psychology of Touch Project**

**Introduction:** As massage therapists we think of touch as something that is skilled, practiced, and professional. We understand that touch has power because we have already felt muscle change, witnessed the reduction of pain, and seen the reestablishment of freer movement patterns. We know that the power of touch goes beyond its ability to address soft-tissue tension patterns. Touch is necessary for life, for physiological and psychological development, and for connection and bonding. This project helps learners recognize the roles that touch plays in their own lives and identify their touch histories. In turn, learners are better able to recognize that clients have touch histories and come to massage sessions with preconceived conscious or subconscious ideas about touch.

**Directions:**

1. Think about the role that touch has played in your life. It can be helpful to use the questions included below as tool to contemplate your relationship to touch.
2. Create an art object (college, poster, hand-made object, painting, etc.) that represents your touch history and current relationship to touch. Prepare a 200-300 word typed description that describes your inspiration for your project.
3. It can be helpful to write a touch history from your life to identify the power of touch in your own life and to think about how it might influence the way you interact with clients and provide massage. Answer these questions in a journal:
4. When I was growing up affection in my family was expressed \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
5. In the culture in which I was raised emotions and touch were viewed as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
6. When I think of non-sexual touch I think of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
7. When I touch people in ways that are not related to massage I feel \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
8. When I touch people in ways related to massage I feel \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
9. When I am touched during a massage I sometimes feel \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
10. When I contemplate the answers I have given to these questions it makes me think about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and feel \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
11. These thoughts and feelings could affect the massage I give because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

**Writing Projects**

* Free Writing
* Journaling
* Poetry
* E-books

**Sample Activity: Free Writing**

**Introduction:** Free writing can be used to wake up thinking, to warm up the mind before an exam, to develop comfort with writing, to help bypass an inner critic, to discover new ideas, to capture feelings in a particular moment, and to relieve stress. In general free writing, you simply sit down and start writing and don’t stop for a defined period of time. You can also use free writing to help students connect to previous knowledge before introducing a new topic or apply what they know in a new way.

**Directions:**

1. Give students a topic.
   1. The topic can be something they already know (i.e., “Write about muscles.”).
   2. The topic might be a new term, concept, or application you want them to explore (i.e., “Last week you learned about fibromyalgia. Now I want you to write down the adaptations you might make during a massage to ensure a client with fibromyalgia has a good massage experience.”).
   3. A self-evaluation exercise (i.e., “Think about how your body feels now that you have had a massage. Write about these feelings and any thoughts you’re thinking right now.”).
2. Direct students to write nonstop for a specified period of time (usually 10-20 minutes).
3. Remind students not to judge what they are writing. There are no right or wrong answers or thoughts. They are freeing their mind to see what comes out. If they don’t know the “answer” to something, that’s the point. They should speculate about a “right” answer or even identify everything they don’t know.
4. If they really can’t get started, have them write, “I don’t know what to write” over and over again until a new thought or idea emerges.
5. Remind students that you will not be collecting or grading their papers. This is a personal exercise to warm up thinking.
6. Have students share some of the thoughts and ideas that emerged from free writing with a small group or with the large group.

**Movement Activities**

* Dance
* Movement
* Embodied Art

**Sample Activity: Body Thinking**

**Introduction:** Body Thinking is an art-based activity that connects the senses to thought during the application of massage techniques. Use it to promote fluidity of massage application, bypass the inner critic, and create better body connection to the application of massage.

**Directions:**

1. Have students pair up for a massage exchange. Ask students to undrape one body area (i.e., the posterior leg).
2. Instruct students to start to apply massage to the body area as they normally would and allow them to settle into a massage of the body area.
3. Next, direct students to perform the massage from a variety of diverse perspectives. For example:
   1. Apply massage as if you are rain (wind, thunder, sleet, snow, sunshine, etc.).
   2. Apply massage as if you are the color blue (red, black, yellow, green, purple, etc.).
   3. Apply massage as if you are an old women (old man, child, blind, etc.).
   4. Apply massage as if you are a giant and you are trying not to hurt the client.
   5. Apply massage as if you are an apple (orange, lime, lemon, etc.).
4. Play and have fun – anything works.
5. At the end of the sessions, process the results with questions like:
   1. How did it feel to apply massage as if you are rain? How did that change the way you moved your body? How did that change the way you thought about the stroke?
   2. How easy was it to embody the color blue? What did you visualize as you applied massage?
   3. What were the challenges with this activity? Was it easy? Was it fun? Was it hard? Why or why not?

**Sample Activity: Reenactment**

**Introduction:** In this art-based activity, groups of students reenact a process or key concept to integrate thinking, feeling, intuition, and knowledge. This activity helps students memorize and recall information on exams.

**Directions:**

1. Write concepts or processes for reenactment on index cards. For example:
   1. Circulation
   2. Lymphatic filtration
   3. Muscle contractions
   4. The stretch reflex
   5. Pain
   6. The establishment of boundaries in a massage practice
   7. The assessment process
2. Break students into small groups and give them their reenactment assignments.
3. Give them a specific amount of time (one week, 30 minutes, etc.) and direct them to represent the process or concept by acting it out.
4. Have students present their reenactments. Film them and post them where students can review them if applicable.

**Activities Using Music or Sound**

* Music
* Rhythm
* Sound
* Song

**Sample Activity: Dance Massage\***

**Introduction:** One of the things that make a great massage is flow. Flow refers to the fluid quality of a therapist’s strokes. The speed of the strokes, the amount of body area covered by strokes, the depth of strokes, and the overall rhythm all contribute to flow. A fun way to help students develop their flow is to practice with dance massage.

**Directions:**

1. Ask learners to bring in a CD with their favorite song. Any style of music is fine (hip hop, alternative, jazz, pop, classical, new age, rock, country, etc.) so long as the song is not explicit or offensive.
2. Have the learners acting as clients situated on the massage tables in the same position (i.e., supine, or prone).
3. Have the learners acting as therapists situated on the same body area (i.e., posterior leg, back, anterior leg, feet, etc.).
4. Play the first song in the CD collection of favorite songs and ask learners to apply strokes according to the music. The goal is to infuse the massage with the quality of the music. What happens to the massage during a song that is sad and haunting? How does the quality of strokes change? What happens to the massage during a song that is fast or aggressive? Each song communicates something different and affects the massage in a new way. Do not judge whether a song is right for a massage—that’s not the point. The point is to feel the music and let it guide your massage as you explore the flow.
5. When the song is over have students re-drape the area and move to the next designated area and play the second song. Again, the goal is to infuse the massage with the quality of the music. It doesn’t matter if learners like the song or not. They simply try to express the music in their massage.
6. Continue to change body areas as songs change until everyone has had a full-body massage with one song per body area. Change places (therapists become clients and clients become therapists) and repeat the exercise with the second group.
7. Process exchanges in a group discussion. Questions might include:
   1. Which type of music seemed to speak directly to you and the way you apply massage?
   2. Which type of music/song changed your massage the most from what you normally do? How did it change?
   3. As clients which song gave you the best massage? Why? What was your therapist doing that you particularly enjoyed?
   4. As clients which song gave you the worst massage? Why? What was your therapist doing that you disliked?
   5. How has this exercise changed your massage for the long term? What lasting change has occurred?
   6. Other comments or insights about this exercise.

**Theatre-Based Activities**

* Skits
* Role-playing
* Reenactment
* Videos

**Sample Activity: The Six Views Activity**

**Introduction:** The Six Views activity forces you to move outside your habitual thinking style and helps you obtain a more rounded view of alternatives. You may look at issues from a very rational and positive viewpoint. From this viewpoint you might miss the emotional, intuitive, and creative aspects of a change process. As a result, you may underestimate the resistance others will have to your plans, or fail to make creative leaps to smoother methods of operations. Similarly, if you habitually view the world from an emotional, intuitive, and creative viewpoint you might fail to plan for logistical challenges or create a process that is financially unsustainable. The Six Views activity helps you see alternatives to problems from a variety of viewpoints and helps you develop comprehensive solutions.

**Directions:**

1. Break students into six groups and ask the groups to review alternatives to a particular problem from their unique perspective:
   1. Group 1: Data Geeks focus on the available data and pay attention to information gaps (where is more information needed and how do we obtain that information?). They look for trends and extrapolate predictions based on historical evidence.
   2. Group 2: Empaths focus on intuition, gut feelings, and emotions. They think about how people will respond to the alternatives emotionally and feel when particular solutions are implemented.
   3. Group 3: Pessimists focus on everything that can possibly go wrong and illuminate all of the obstacles and challenges to each alternative solution.
   4. Group 4: Optimists see the good in every idea and predict all of the best outcomes from each alternative solution.
   5. Group 5: Doers identify all of the tasks that will need to be accomplished to implement alternative solutions. This group illuminates the scope of effort required to adopt each alternative solution.
   6. Group 6: The managers understand that processes and procedures must be adopted to support implementation of each alternative solution. They look for ways to ensure stakeholders will buy-in to any adopted solution.

Have groups explore their different views in a discussion playing their characters and sticking firmly to their views. After the groups have expressed their different views, a note-taker can reflect key issues, challenges, opportunities, strengths, and weaknesses that emerge from the exploration of each alternative.

**Sample Activity: The Animal Game**

**Introduction:** The Animal Game is an art-based activity that alerts students to issues of inclusion and exclusion, minority and majority voices. This is a good exercise to use before ethical discussions about tolerance for client groups, when a group of learners has formed “cliques,” or when some members of a class are being left out and isolated by the group.

**Directions:**

1. Write up small pieces of paper with names of barnyard animals. For example, make up three papers with the word “cow,” two papers with the word “horse,” four papers with the word “pig,” one paper with the word “bird,” and one paper with the word “sheep.” It is important that there are different numbers of animals and that at least two animals are only represented one time.
2. Hand each learner a piece of paper with the name of a barnyard animal, which they are asked not to share with others.
3. Direct learners to close their eyes and walk about the room with their eyes closed, making their animal sound, with the goal of listening for and moving toward those who sound like they do.
4. After a few minutes, ask the group to open their eyes and look around. What you are likely to see is that the “cows” have linked arms, that the pigs are “oinking” happily in a group, that the two horses have found each other, but that the “bird” is dazed and switching between clucking like a hen to cawing like a crow in desperation, and the sheep is forlornly “bleeting.”
5. Members of each animal group are asked to describe how they felt during the process and what it was like to find one another. Many express relief and joy at locating another member of their group, while those who are alone identify feelings of frustration and isolation. Sometimes, depending on the size of the group, participants can’t find each other given the loud voices of the animals in the majority. This exercise helps to raise awareness of feelings of isolation, the processes of inclusion/exclusion, and illustrates majority and minority voices.

**Installations**

**Sample Activity: Massage History Wall**

**Introduction:** Massage history is one of those topics that often gets short-changed in a jam-packed massage curriculum. This art-based activity helps you reinforce massage history concepts while providing a beautiful art installation for the campus.

**Directions:**

1. Assign a student or a small group a history topic (The Greeks and Massage, The Roman’s and Massage, Swedish Massage, Massage in 1950’s America, etc.)
2. On 8 ½ x 11 inch poster board ask students to represent the concept with key words, images, drawings, diagrams, 200 words of less of descriptive text and pictures.
3. Create a giant timeline down a hallway and have students attach their concept boards in the appropriate places on the timeline.
4. New classes fill in new topics in different time frames.
5. Overtime the school has a beautiful and unique history of massage installation.

**Sample Activity: Human Installation**

**Introduction:** The Human Installation activity is used as an effective way to end other learning activities or to ground the learning that has occurred in a series of classes or in a course. It also creates body learning, brings closure, creates an embodied image of the collective experience, and requires negotiation and dialogue among learners. Be prepared, as this activity tends to cause initial anxiety in learners the first time they try it. You may also want to have a camera on hand to capture the installations for learners as they can be amazingly creative and beautiful.

**Directions:**

1. At the beginning of class, the learners are advised that they will be invited to create a human installation at the end of the class. They can use themselves and any resources in the classroom to portray their collective learning experience in the class/course.
2. Allow students 15 minutes to dialogue and plan their installation. Instructors should leave the room and give students privacy to create their installation.
3. Learners are generally energized by these challenges and work creatively with shared leadership to develop wonderful, creative installations. In one example at a conference, a group of participants represented homeless people with learners as statues in various poses, standing on tables and laying on the ground, while a well-dressed person walked briskly through the crowd not looking at anyone. The human installation process creates a lasting impression of the learning experience.