

# USING PHOTOTHERAPY TECHNIQUES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION AND CROSS-CULTURAL/DIVERSITY THERAPY

Presenter: Judy Weiser, R.Psych., A.T.R., Founder & Director, PhotoTherapy Centre

## **Abstract/Description for Program:**

PhotoTherapy techniques (especially when combined with Art Therapy) can be particularly effective as additional tools for therapy with people who are "different" in some way. This Course combines slide-illustrated presentations, discussions, case illustrations and experientials about using PhotoTherapy in Special Education (morning) and Cross-Cultural/Diversity (afternoon) therapy applications.

NOTE: *Prior experience with cameras not required!*

## **Objectives:**

Presentation attendees will exit, being able to:

- 1) Understand why and how PhotoTherapy techniques are particularly beneficial for cross-cultural, diversity, and special education applications, particularly in active combination with art therapy techniques.
- 2) Experience one of these techniques personally ("Photo-Projectives"), through guided exercises and role-plays, followed by the opportunity to pair off into "dyads" to practice using them as if in "live" practice.
- 3) Begin using them immediately in their own art therapy (or other kinds of counseling) practice.

\* *NOTE: Participation is voluntary and for the purposes of participants' education, not personal therapy.*

## **Methodology:**

Slide-illustrated lecture presentations, case examples presented and discussed, interaction and discussion with participants, experiential exercises (with debriefing and closure), question & answer periods.

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While the meaning, or "feeling", of any photograph is commonly believed to come from that image itself -- this is actually (phenomenologically) projected *by* each viewer during their process of perceiving it (Gregory, 1966; Haber & Hershenson, 1973; Metz, 1980,1981; Ziller, et.al., 1975, 1990). This holds true for *all* photos that people take, pose for, look at, keep, view, imagine, or remember -- whether in their own personal collections or on gallery walls (Comfort, 1985; Krauss, 1983; Stewart, 1979, Walker 1981; Weiser, 1999).

Therefore, *any* time a photograph is viewed or recalled, projection of meaning *will* take place (and associated feelings will be automatically, though unconsciously, triggered!) -- whether this is a photo of self or others, or even if just of places or pets!

Thus the importance of a personal snapshot lies less in what it is *of*, visually, than in what in what it is *about*, emotionally. And therefore, the meaning of any photograph (as constructed by its maker) will usually not be the same as its "story" when perceived by later viewers -- and *all* of this is dependent upon, and reflective of, each person's underlying value system, beliefs, personal constructs, expectations, and so forth.

A person's values will frame their expectations and actually *define* what they notice! (Blinn, 1986; Carpenter, 1987; Collier, 1986, Fisher, 1961; Goffman, 1963; Gutman, 1982; Hall, 1969,1976; Kulich & Goldberg, 1987; Lofgren, 1982; Poyatos, 1988; Ruby, 1981; Segall, et. al, 1966; Woilfgang, 1984). The unconscious filters that people live their daily lives through, and communicate from, are formed by not just their own life experiences, but also their own particular background matrix of cultural, racial, and family differences, as well as myriad other special unique things about them (such as physical or educational limitations, social differences based on sexual orientation, religion or gender expectations, and so forth).

*All* "background filters" from which people view photographs (and each other, as well as life itself!) are automatically and unconsciously created, framed, defined, and perceptually-activated by such "differences that make a difference" to them, selectively, *whether or not* these are at all obvious to any therapist trying to help them. And because this all happens in a split-second of communication, these kinds of ego-centric and ethno-centric "selective perceptions" will deeply impact and affect any therapy process, especially clients (or their therapists!) who are from non-mainstream cultures, races, or those with physical or mental impairments.

And since most of these factors affect even verbal discussions, PhotoTherapy techniques (especially when combined with Art Therapy) can be particularly effective as additional tools for probing these "deeper unconscious layers" and helping improve

communication between people, by bringing to light those differences which they are always strongly affected by -- yet which they may previously have been unaware of the effects of.

PhotoTherapy techniques have long been used in Special Education (Nath, 1981, 1984a, 1984b,; Weiser, 1983, 1988b, 1999; Wolf, 1982) and Cross-Cultural/Diversity (Weiser 1975, 1988a, 1999) -- as well as in therapy, education, research, and other settings where awareness of differential perceptions (and personal expectations based on these) are crucial components of the communication process involved.

This Course (by a Presenter with over thirty years of therapy with clients with both special needs and from non-mainstream cultures) will provide the background rationale and theoretical foundations for using ordinary snapshots and family photos as a bridge into emotions, memories, feelings, and information otherwise inaccessible to verbal interactions alone. It will combine slide-illustrated presentations and discussions (including numerous case examples) with some experiential opportunities for participants to see for themselves *how* these techniques can be so effective in bringing to conscious awareness some of the underlying differences that can complicate therapy process, if their effects are not recognized. Many handouts will be given to provide summary of presentation information, recommended further readings, and to guide the experiential portions.

The morning session will focus on using PhotoTherapy techniques in Special Education applications (which is where a lot of the early PhotoTherapy work began!) and the afternoon session will address Cross-Cultural applications, including Diversity Training, and with other groups of people where perceptions, values, or expectations will be differentially formed due to differences often invisibly affecting their interactions with those trying to help them (sexual or class- or illness-based minorities, for example).

NOTE: This Course is open to beginners as well as experienced therapists. And, although the best learning will happen by taking both half-days of this Course, participants are welcome to choose to take only one half-day, if necessary.]

*Prior experience with cameras or photographic art is NOT a pre-requirement!*

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### Course Outline:

***IMPORTANT:*** *This is a two-part Course -- participants can attend the full day, or either half of it, and still benefit from the material. Of course for full learning, the entire day is preferable!*

### Schedule for the Day:

- 1) Both Morning and Afternoon sessions will begin with slide-illustrated presentations to provide rationale and theoretical perspective for the use of PhotoTherapy techniques in both a) Special Education (*morning*) and b) Cross-Cultural/Diversity (*afternoon*) applications. These will include numerous case illustrations and brief photo-based interactions with participants as a group, in order to illustrate the variety of applications possible. (time proportion in each half-day: approximately 2/3 of session time)
- 2) In both halves of the day, there will also be smaller experiential components involving demonstrations of how these techniques "feel" and how they can be effectively used to activate aspects of therapy most relevant re: Special Education & Special Needs (*morning*) and Cross-Cultural/Diversity (*afternoon*) therapeutic considerations. (time proportion in each half-day: approximately 1/3 of session time).

This experiential portion will be done according to the framework below:

Participants will:

First, interact one-on-one with Presenter during in guided role-play exercises, using their personally-selected photographs for the focus of attention to the "work" Presenter will experientially lead them through.

Second, personally practice and experience the skills just learned, in private discussions with each other dyads (while Presenter remains available for additional help and guidance), and

Third, share and de-brief what has just happened in experiential process, thus learning from others' experiences in their own dyads, as well.

At the end of each session (morning/afternoon), the Presenter will have participants re-group for a final debriefing and purposes of closure (and to encourage further discussion, as well as to answer any remaining questions).

Educational handouts will be provided to provide summary information, recommended readings, and to assist with experiential components.

*\* NOTE: Participation in experiential portions is voluntary, and for the purposes of participants' education, not personal therapy.*