

**Movement/Sound-based Expressive Arts Based on the Tamalpa Life/Art Process:  
A New Approach for Alzheimer's Patients  
By Julia Gilden, MA**

During the last year, I have been leading a class for the participants of Senior Access, a day program in San Rafael, California, for adults with early stage Alzheimer's Disease, and at the Personal Care Unit at The Redwoods, a retirement residential facility in Mill Valley, California. I have found that these populations are surprisingly responsive to expressive arts activities, and benefit directly from the techniques from Tamalpa Institute's Life/Arts process .

Founded by modern dance pioneer Anna Halprin and her daughter, Daria, Tamalpa was established in the seventies and is part of a growing international integrated expressive arts and psychology movement. Tamalpa combines techniques and processes from Gestalt Psychology, movement, drawing, and writing to explore what our bodies can teach us about our selves and others.

For older, cognition-compromised people, I use elements of Anna Halprin's Movement Ritual to awaken the spine and study its connection to all body parts. Although we work in chairs, participants are able to incorporate many of the concepts and movements. As we progress through a class, I invite participants to offer movements for the class to follow. The result is that participants who are rarely verbal or physically expressive have come forward to offer movements and sounds for the group to copy, which allows them a more active role within the community, a development noticed and appreciated by all participants. At the same time, participants who have the ability to communicate but who may be shy, are also able to more fully participate by taking brief and safe leadership roles as they come up with a movement or sound for every one to copy or incorporate that fits the motif of the moment. Feedback from staff and participants is that on the days I lead a group exercise, they are more energized and vocal afterwards and for the rest of the day. I find it remarkable that they are, by being increasingly responsive, able to teach me and others what they need to practice for their growth and

sense of inclusion.

Another Tamalpa technique I employ is body-part mapping. Working with one body part, for example head or hands, participants work alone or in pairs, with very little instruction, simply exploring. Afterwards, they find other ways to amplify the movement. We talk about how metaphors influence how we move, and then use those ideas in further explorations. I am planning to follow movement with drawing where possible.

Recently, I began introducing a basic version of “scoring,” a system devised by Anna and Lawrence Halprin to determine the elements of an activity (e.g., intention, space, time, activity, relationship). I begin a sequence and the participants add to it until we have four to six distinct movements with sounds and relationship to the group. This concept is generating more participation from participants who have until now been mostly passive. Participants are increasingly able to and interested in the ideas behind exercises or explorations, an example of how expressive movement brings body and mind together and releases the creative spirit.

Many geriatric medical researchers, such as Dr. Bruce Miller, Director of UCSF’s Aging and Memory Center, are reporting the beneficial effects of expressive arts for people with a wide range of neurological-based mind impairment, including those with Alzheimer’s Disease. Visual arts and writing when used in an expressive environment have been widely documented; movement, less so; and efforts to blend arts disciplines has been described very little from what I have found in the literature. This is an area I am actively exploring.

**Mood, Movement, and Memory: an Age-related Neurodegenerative Complex**, a Short Opinion Piece by Lotta Granholm, Heather Boger, and Marina Emborg for the American Society for Neural Therapy and Repair, offers possible neuro-biological connections between deteriorating functions related to Alzheimer’s and to Parkinson’s Disease, and indicate that investigators have started to look “biological and/or clinical connection between the triad of symptoms (emotions, cognition and movement).

From my experiences leading expressive visual art, poetry, movement, and drama exercises at Senior Access, I conclude that Alzheimer's patients can benefit from all of the arts in ways that allow them the widest possible range of creative input in the moment, but I observe that movement is the most empowering and seems to connect participants to their deeper feelings and imaginings.

I welcome feedback on this report, including possible uses, questions, comments, research, or other resources,

Related Professional background:

BA, Psychology; Stanford University

MA, Education, Dance Specialization; Stanford University

Guided Imagery/Expressive Arts Certificate; Institute of Health and Healing, California Pacific Medical Center

Tamalpa Institute's Movement-Based Expressive Arts Professional Training Program; in Level II program

Julia Gilden  
29 Hayes St  
San Rafael, CA 94901  
415-726-6794  
[wildcat@well.com](mailto:wildcat@well.com)