

FINAL REPORT – VAVROUŠEK SCHOLARSHIP

NAME: Tereza Dvorská

YEAR OF STUDY: 3rd year of master degree programme MRES

TOPIC OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT: The Work That Reconnects with usage of expressive therapies

SCHOLARSHIP AMOUNT: 12 000 CZK

COUNTRY OF IMPLEMENTATION: Czech Republic

PERIOD: 19.-22.9.2024

Brief description of the research project

The course took place in late September 2024 and served as a key component of my diploma research. Over the course of four days, participants engaged in a qualitative study focused on environmental distress and the emotional responses associated with it, such as sadness, anxiety, depression, aggression etc. The participants spent this time in a green forested area, which provided a natural and serene environment conducive to reflection and emotional exploration.

The central theme of the research was the examination of how individuals process their emotional reactions to environmental changes. To facilitate this exploration, I employed the *Work That Reconnects* method developed by the American therapist and deep ecologist Joanna Macy. This method is structured into four distinct stages, which corresponded to each day of the course. The aim was to help participants reconnect with their emotional experiences in relation to environmental issues and to foster a deeper understanding of their emotional landscape.

In addition to using Macy's method, I integrated elements of expressive therapies, a field in which I am currently pursuing my second Master's degree in music therapy. This integration was designed to provide participants with creative tools for expressing and processing the emotions they experienced during the course. The combination of these therapeutic techniques allowed me to track the phenomenological shifts in each participant, particularly how their emotional, bodily, and cognitive states evolved over the course of the program.

A key aspect of the course was the creation of a safe and supportive space for therapeutic work. This environment was intended to offer a secure place for participants to share their emotional experiences, explore new perspectives, and reflect on their roles in addressing environmental challenges. Throughout the course, various data collection tools were used, including diaries, recorded feedback, and artefacts. Participants were asked to maintain diaries in which they documented their emotional experiences, including specific emotions felt, the

physical sensations associated with those emotions, and any notable occurrences or reflections. The diaries provided valuable insights into the ways in which emotions related to environmental distress manifested in the body and mind.

To ensure the integrity and professionalism of the therapeutic process, I was supported by a trained therapist who assisted in holding the therapeutic space and guiding the group through the various stages of the *Work That Reconnects*. Given that I am still in the process of my own therapeutic training. The presence of this professional support was invaluable in maintaining a secure and effective environment for emotional exploration.

Description of the activities

As I mentioned in the brief description above, The Work that Reconnects was the method used in my research. It is structured into four main stages.

1. ***Gratitude***

This stage encouraged participants to cultivate a deep sense of gratitude for life itself, for the natural world, and for the gifts of community, resilience, and hope. It shifts the focus from scarcity and despair to abundance and possibility, strengthening participants' emotional and general well-being.

2. ***Honoring the Pain of the World***

In this stage, participants were encouraged to acknowledge and connect with the grief, pain, and distress caused by environmental and social crises. The goal is to recognize the depth of emotional responses to ecological devastation and to hold space for those feelings without judgment.

3. ***Seeing with New Eyes***

This stage involves reframing the participants' perspectives on environmental challenges. It aims to help them shift from feelings of helplessness or despair to a sense of empowerment and clarity. The goal is to help individuals see their relationship with the world and the environment in a more interconnected and hopeful light.

4. ***Going Forth***

The "Going Forth" stage focuses on helping participants connect with their sense of purpose and the actions they can take in response to the environmental challenges they face. It encourages individuals to take meaningful steps in addressing ecological issues, whether on a personal, community, or societal level.

Here is a list of expressive therapy techniques used in the course: musical improvisation, abstract painting, Gestalt theater (mask work, role-playing, performance etc.), intuitive movement. Some of these are visible in the attached photo documentation.

Benefits of the research for the student and the university

The topic of this research brings several benefits both for the student (researcher) and for the university.

For the **student**, engaging with the subject of environmental distress and emotional responses provided an opportunity to explore a deeply relevant and timely issue. It allowed me to expand the understanding of how individuals process emotions related to ecological crises, particularly through the lens of expressive therapies. The whole experience gave me an insight into leading a therapeutic process and allowed me to combine both academic and practical experiences from my studies.

For the **university**, the research holds significant value as it contributes to an emerging and interdisciplinary field that blends environmental studies, psychology, and expressive arts therapies. It places the institution at the forefront of innovative research addressing urgent global issues such as climate change, environmental distress, and mental health. The unique combination of artistic therapies with environmental themes demonstrates the university's commitment to fostering creativity, well-being, and social responsibility within its academic programs. This research also opens opportunities for future collaboration and engagement with both academic and non-academic communities concerned with environmental and emotional health.

Presentation of the outcomes of the research project

In conclusion, the course provided a rich opportunity for participants to engage deeply with their emotional responses to environmental distress, while also allowing me to explore the efficacy of combining expressive therapies with Joanna Macy's *Work That Reconnects*. The data collected through diaries, feedback, and artefacts will serve as a foundation for further analysis, helping to illuminate the ways in which individuals process and respond to environmental challenges on a personal level. Outcomes will be presented in my diploma thesis and printed next year 2025.

Some feedbacks from participants:

„I am glad I had the opportunity to focus on this topic, which is very important to me. Normally, my thoughts are occupied with everyday concerns such as school, work, and relationships. However, here I had the space to pause and concentrate on something that truly matters to me. The whole group made me feel very safe.“

– M.

„It was easy for me to open up, thanks to the openness of the group. Before I came, I felt that nature was something distant, separate from me, as if it existed "over there" and not as a part of me. But through the experiences I had, I was able to feel that the whole thing is interconnected with me — I was able to connect with it.“

– D.

„It was important for me to stay and reflect on my emotions regarding the topic. It was a great experience. I learned a lot about myself, and the community helped me find new ways to understand my feelings and my role in addressing environmental changes.“

– L.

FINAL BUDGET

| Budget | Total | My own expenditures | Contributions from Vavroušek Scholarship |
|--------------|------------------|---------------------|--|
| Ubytování | 12 150CZK | 150CZK | 12 000 CZK |
| Co-terapeut | 9 650CZK | 0CZK * | - |
| Strava | 8 320CZK | 8 320CZK | - |
| Pomůcky | 1 715CZK | 1 365CZK * | - |
| Transport | 830CZK | 830CZK | - |
| Others | - | - | - |
| Total | 32 665CZK | 10 665CZK | 12 000CZK |

*IGA project contribution from Pedagogical faculty (UPOL)

Thanks to the financial support from both the scientific and pedagogical faculties of Palacký University, my qualitative research became a reality. Special thanks are extended to the department of expressive therapies, from where the musical instruments were made available for borrowing.