Chapter 3
Creating a Sustainable Community:
An Interprofessional Approach Using Arts-Based Interventions

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ABSTRACT

Faculty and staff in higher education today face obstacles such as reduced resources, increased work-loads, and uncertain expectations. In this context, the authors have worked to create a sustainable and resilient community using arts-based interventions. The chapter begins with a review of the literature on arts-based interventions for well-being, with a focus on supporting faculty and staff in higher education. The authors outline the steps they have taken, through their Arts and Health Collaborative, to create a sustainable environment of support. By providing sample workshop outlines and recommendations for systemic changes, they share an arts and health model that others can implement on their own campuses.

INTRODUCTION

Work-life imbalance, compassion fatigue, and burnout are widely recognized as issues for those in the helping, and caring professions (Choi, Kohli & Thomas, 2014; Fancourt, 2017; Geiger, Segal, Shockley & Wagaman, 2015; Santoro, 2011), and these same concerns can impact faculty and staff working in higher education. In fact, education or teaching is considered one of the helping professions. Reports of burnout, job stress, work-life imbalance, and low levels of engagement are prevalent, especially for younger faculty. This is particularly true within contexts where there are budget cuts, increased or unclear expectations, and less support from colleagues or institutions (Schubert-Irastorza & Fabry, 2014).

In this demanding context, it is critical for faculty and staff to work in an environment that promotes resilience, self-reflection, and sustainable practice. Resilience is often discussed in the literature on burnout in the helping professions, where self-care for professionals may include activities such as yoga, journaling, exercise, meditation, and more (Lusk & Terrazas, 2015). These activities, along with arts-based interventions, can assist individuals in cultivating mindfulness, bringing awareness to the self and others, practicing a non-judgmental attitude, and reducing burnout. Indeed, there is a growing body of research to support the connection between mindfulness, improved well-being, and decreased stress (Greeson, Garland, & Black, 2014; Gu, Strauss, Bond & Vacanagh, 2015). Reducing burnout and stress while improving resilience can lead to a more sustainable workplace.

The literature highlights how the arts impact health and healing (Fancourt, 2017; Hertrampf & Warja, 2017; Staricoff, 2004; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). Participation in the arts, whether through music, dance, collage, pottery, or other art forms, can improve cognitive, behavioral, and social outcomes (NEA, 2011). Grounded in ancient cultural traditions and spiritual practices, the process of artmaking and of creating is healing (Clift & Camic, 2016; Fancourt, 2017). Today, many arts-based practitioners are returning to the ancient traditions, where the arts are embedded in everyday practice and available to all people, not just a select talented few. Indeed, the arts "belong to all of us, in the service of life and well-being" (Atkins & Williams, 2007, p. xii).

In order to address burnout and support a resilient, sustainable community, the authors formed an Arts and Health Collaborative. In this book chapter, the authors will review the literature on arts-based interventions that support health and wellness, and outline the steps they have taken to create a sustainable environment of support in higher education for themselves and their faculty and staff colleagues. By providing sample workshop outlines and recommendations for systemic changes, the authors will put forward a model that others can implement on their own campuses.

BACKGROUND

The current context in higher education can include budget cuts, unclear job expectations, increasing pressures, high levels of burnout, work-life imbalance, stress, and, in some cases, less support (Schubert-Irastorza & Fabry, 2014). Given this environment, faculty and staff must consider how they can support one another, create a sustainable community, and promote resilience and well-being. The authors have found that the healing arts are a perfect medium to support faculty and staff in these contexts.

The authors' specific focus is on creating a sustainable community in higher education using arts-based interventions. Sustainable communities are those that are active and thriving, supportive and welcoming, and sensitive to the needs of diverse members. One way to create sustainable communities

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