

THE JOY OF DEMENTIA (YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING!)

*Creating a new performance of life
(and dementia)*

*Mary Fridley, East Side Institute and
Reimagining Dementia Coalition*

Dementia is viewed almost exclusively through the lens of loss, including the loss of our ability to think, to reason, to recognize, to remember, to *know*.

In a society which believes that we are little more than our brains, perhaps this is why people living with dementia are related to as no longer human.

Susan Massad and Mary Fridley



OVERCOMING OUR OBSESSION WITH KNOWING

The Basics of Improvisation

Improvisation is the ability to say “yes, and” – to actively listen, accept “offers” and build with them.

Yes, and... helps teach active listening, which is crucial to being present in the moment, rather than thinking of what to say next.

Improvisation creates a “level playing field” where participants can go beyond the scripted roles and attitudes that prevent us from growing as adults. It’s not about “knowing what to do”, it’s about building the ensemble and making the group look good.

Improvisation is created collectively. One person is neither solely responsible for, nor credited with, the development of the performance.



WHEN SEEN AS AN OFFER AND NOT AS TRAGEDY

Dementia is an opportunity, if we so choose, to be improvisational, to be silly, to play, to free ourselves from the constraints of truth and knowing and assumptions.

It invites us to go outside our comfort zones and create environments in which “non-knowing growing” is possible for everyone.



**What is to be
human?**



WHO/WHAT ARE PEOPLE?

WE ARE

Shaped by our
environment

Tool users...

Adapters to culture...

Members of identity and
geographical
communities

We behave

We are who we are...

AND, WE ARE ALSO

Shapers of our
environments

Tool makers

Creators of culture

Builders of new
communities

We perform

We are other than who
we are/We are who we
are becoming

PLAY AND PRETENDING



We learn and develop by performing
with others who we are becoming.

WHY PLAY?

The opposite of play is not work. It's depression.

Brian Sutton-Smith, anthropologist and play theorist

Our world needs to develop. By development, we mean creating new responses to existing situations. These new responses can be feelings, ways of thinking and understanding, ways of seeing and talking and doing your relationships, and more. If we only do what we know how to do, we remain trapped and continue to suffer. **And that's why we play.**

“In a world as totally alienated as ours doing anything approaching living requires that we perform. To be natural in our hyper-cognitive society is to be dead in life. **Unnaturalness is required if we are to live at all.**”



WHY PERFORMANCE

In performing, we can

- ✧ Go beyond ourselves
- ✧ Do things without knowing how
- ✧ Relate as who we are and who we're becoming—at the very same time
- ✧ Create something new out of what exists, including the “crap” of life.



Playing and performing with language

Language is a creative cultural social activity. Words don't get their meaning from the dictionary...or from the things they name. What confuses us is our belief that if a word means something, there must be an object it corresponds to.

Lois Holzman, *The Overweight Brain*

Dementia gives us an opportunity to question how time and language and perception work...to use words, repetition, pauses and silences, gestures and images in new ways...

Sally Tisdale, author and nurse

Want to learn how to talk? Listen. Complete, don't compete.

Fred Newman



Father and baby in conversation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yn8j4XRxSck>



CREATING THE DEMENTIA ENSEMBLE

Alzheimer's can be a liberating event, an opportunity to fly. This is in no way to dismiss the pain and suffering that comes from dementia, but to understand that a lot of that pain and suffering comes from the response. Being related to like you're no longer human is way more destructive than the tragedies that are intrinsic to dementia itself." *Jennifer Carson, Director of the Dementia Engagement, Education and Research Program, University of Nevada, Reno*

Dementia gives us all the opportunity to shift from the expectation of memory to the freedom of imagination. *Anne Davis Basting, Creative Care*





REIMAGINING DEMENTIA:

A CREATIVE COALITION FOR JUSTICE

INTERNATIONAL CLASS



GLOBAL PLAY BRIGADE



FOR MORE INFO OR TO CONTACT US

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www.reimaginingdementia.com

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LIFE IS WORTH DOING

EXPERIENCE

RECREATIONAL THERAPY

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**Sign-In 2: The Joy of Dementia:
Creating a New Performance of
Dementia (and Life)** by Eastside
Institute & Reimagine Dementia



<https://bit.ly/joy-of-dementia2>