



## Introducing the IEATA March 2022 Member Spotlight:



### Heather Thorp, MSSA, LCSW, REAT



Tree Window into the Appalachian Mountains  
Rocky Knob Trail, Boone NC

#### What drew you to the field of Expressive Arts?

I have been interested in the arts my entire life. I grew up in a musical, artistic spiritual family. In 1997 I was hired as a clinician at a women's treatment center for substance abuse and they asked me to do an expressive arts group. In 2003 I moved to North Carolina and discovered the Appalachian State University Expressive Arts Therapy Program and my mentor Dr. Sally Atkins, one of the original collective members who founded the program. I completed my certificate and became a REAT in 2010 under Dr. Atkins' supervision.

#### How are you implementing multimodal expressive arts in the domains of therapeutic work, artistic practice, consultation, education, and activism?

Prior to discovering EXA I took multiple classes in various arts modalities. As a student and as graduate of the ASU EXA program I attended the EXA Institute as a small group leader, a facilitator of the small group leaders, and as a faculty member.

I have taught and co taught classes in the EXA program at Appalachian State University including Therapeutic Writing, Current Issues in EXA, and Multimodal EXA. After taking the Therapeutic Writing course I started a bimonthly writing group which has been meeting for the past 10 years.

I have presented at the EXA conferences in Hong Kong, Winnipeg, and Berkeley, CA. I was on the Board of IEATA as the co chair of the social action committee 2015-2018 and then the co-chair of the membership committee 2018-2021.

I have been a licensed clinical social worker and worked with children, youth, and adults incorporating EXA in individual and group work with clients. I have presented at the Council on Social Work Education about the use of multimodal expressive arts in field education orientation.

In 2014 I became a SoulCollage(r) facilitator and taught classes including EXA to community members.

I invited faculty and staff to be part of a learning community which later became research for a colleague and friend's dissertation. We painted a canvas labyrinth which I later took to conferences, in addition to facilitating local gatherings, for participants to walk the labyrinth and create aesthetic responses through writing and art making. The labyrinth has also been used as a tool for self care offered to faculty and students sponsored by an Arts and Health group in the College of Health Sciences at ASU.

I began to co-facilitate a monthly Death Cafe in which we have a community conversation about death and loss. In this group we have used poetry and ritual to open and close the gathering.

I entered a doctorate in educational leadership program when it began offering a concentration in expressive arts. I will graduate in May 2022. My dissertation focuses on creativity, sacredness, and social and environmental justice. I invited women to participate in intermodal expressive arts in the woods of the Southern Appalachian Mountains, or our storyplace.



Handmade Journals for Doctoral Participants

### **How do you envision your work and artistic practice moving forward?**

I would like to continue working with groups of women in the intersections of creativity (EXA), sacredness, and social and environmental justice. I envision continuing to provide sacred EXA inspired ceremonies and rituals to honor celebrations, transitions, loss, and death. As a feminist, social worker, mother, and lesbian I will continue to advocate for social and environmental justice. I believe in the need for both quiet prayers and loud protesting. I envision continuing to find ways to incorporate EXA in all that I do.

### **What are your thoughts on the current role of expressive arts in your region and internationally?**

Where I live in the Appalachian Mountains is rich in culture and biodiversity. The Appalachian Mountains are one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world. The mountains are not as tall as others due to them being ancient. From this storyplace I am fascinated with the intersections of local issues and global issues and how the arts can contribute to caring for the earth, all humans and other-than-humans.

### **How does being a part of IEATA impact your work in expressive arts?**

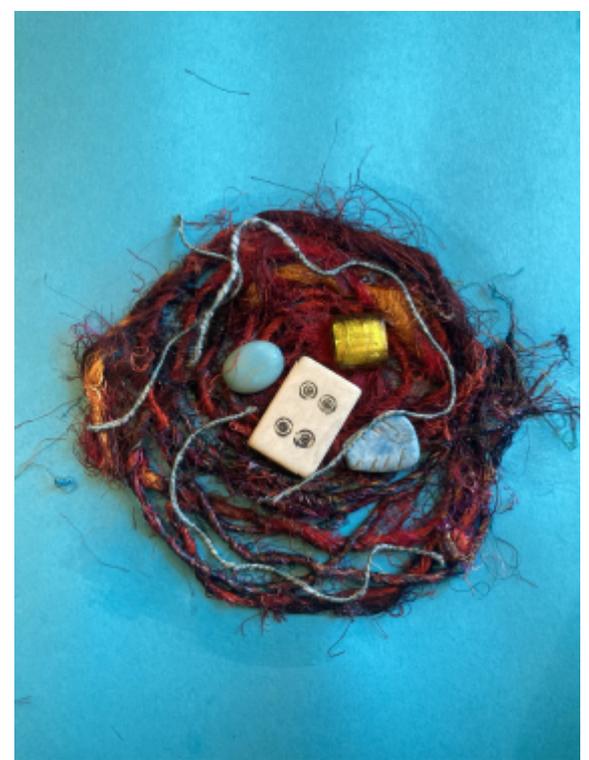
Being a member of IEATA indicates my commitment and love of the profession. I believe that EXA is needed in our work and our lives to address personal and community capacity to grow and prosper. While being a member of IEATA is not required for the doing of expressive arts, I believe that a commitment to the profession of expressive arts is essential to continue to grow the organization and share all the gifts EXA has to offer with others. Members are so very fortunate to be able to be part of this amazing community and all that it has to offer.

## Education:

- Ohio State University, BSW
- Case Western Reserve University, MSSA (Graduate degree in Social Work)
- Appalachian State University, Graduate Certificate in Expressive Arts Therapy
- Appalachian State University, Doctorate in Educational Leadership with a Concentration in Expressive Arts Education Research and Leadership  
Expected graduation 5/6/22

## Heather Thorp's Contact Information

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Nested Ceremony; Aesthetic Response

## IEATA MEMBER SPOTLIGHT NOMINATIONS

*Help Others to Shine*

**Who can you  
nominate?**

**Active Student & Professional  
Members**

- Do you know of a member who has:
- used the expressive or creative arts to achieve excellence in their field and/or made significant, observable changes or accomplishments?
  - Contributed a new idea or thinking outside of the box in a way that is beneficial to the field of expressive and creative arts and/or their local or international community?
  - has taken the initiative to resolve a major challenge and motivate others to do the same?

**How to Nominate a  
Member**

**Email Us @ [rorndorff@ieata.org](mailto:rorndorff@ieata.org)**

Please email us the following details of the member you are nominating:

- **First and Last Name**
- **Contact Email Address**
- **Why you are nominating them to be a Member Spotlight**

*\*We do not guarantee all nominees will be asked to be the Member Spotlight. There are limited spots available and if not chosen this year please consider submitting your nominee in the following year.*

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