

essentially Siberians from the far East). He felt that meditation, for instance, which was based upon redemption through ego-loss, was destructive to Westerners. Such a state of ego-lessness could be experienced by some as a regression that could reach even psychotic proportions. I am not stating that introducing the idea of the creation of animal amulets would drive the cub scouts insane; only that the outcomes of such dabbling in hunter-gatherer/animistic belief systems with magical charms, totems or amulets may be questioned by current politically correct factions in education and psychotherapy.

In the end, there was only minimal criticism or concern over these or any other issues by the parents, administrations or others who participated in these workshops. Success seemed to lie in the neutrality of our interventions, which allowed for socially or emotionally loaded topics to be engaged through respectful dialogues without actually controlling outcomes. In this way we brought a lively topic to the community which was made artful through the creation of small intimate sculptures of a big, black, beautiful animal.

Claywork as conflict resolution

Community issues can also be addressed through group sculpting experiences which double as a socialization program. In one such initiative, figure sculpting became a means of facilitating conflict resolution between teenage gang members and others struggling with violence in the inner city. Art therapist Erich Preis conducts such conflict resolution sculpture groups at the School for Social Change in the Bronx, New York City, where violence is a way of life. Rather than working from an emotion-based or expressionistic standpoint, Preis's approach is highly academic, with his young men and women working in classical techniques of realistic figurative sculpture. Because teens are often concrete-minded, they seem to respond to art which is also quite literal. For many adolescents it is developmentally appropriate for them to be naturally narcissistic and thus idealize their figures. They will also equate a sculpture's realistic qualities, particularly the cut of the figure's musculature, with a sense of their own burgeoning sexuality, mastery and self-esteem. In Preis's sculpting sessions, groups of gang-affiliated teens

discuss their grievances, mediate differences and socialize, all while working their figures. Taken from a gallery-announcement card, the illustration shows a group of young men engaging in dialogue while busily working on various figures (Figure 30). The sculptures are shown interacting as well. They are posed interacting in a spirited and animated exchange that is ultimately peaceful. Because Preis himself is severely hearing disabled and dyslexic, he exemplifies how one can overcome issues such as illiteracy and anger, and channel strong feelings through a pro-social and creative outlet (Kountourakis 2001). The success of this program has earned Preis a number of sponsors who will ensure that this important work will be supported in the future.