



1

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“IT’S SOMEWHERE ELSE INSTEAD”

HEALING GARDENS AS TRANSFORMATIVE SPACES

HALFWAY DOWN

*Halfway up the stairs
Isn't up,
And isn't down.
It isn't in the nursery,
It isn't in the town.
All sorts of funny thoughts
Run around my head: it really isn't
Anywhere!
It's somewhere else instead!
... A.A. Milne (1924)*

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LES JARDINS THÉRAPEUTIQUES EN TANT QU'ESPACES DE TRANSFORMATION

OFTEN I AM ASKED, “What makes a healing garden, healing?” The answer is that any garden is healing and research proves it to be so. It has been my experience, however, that deep transformative experiences can be facilitated in gardens designed specifically for healthcare settings. Healing Gardens and exterior natural spaces within healthcare settings create liminal spaces that facilitate transformation in individuals, small groups and communities.

In *Revisoning the Earth*, Paul Devereaux's practical guide to using the power and energy of nature to heal ourselves (1996), he writes that a “liminal condition is a phase of transition between different states of being, and can apply to a wide variety of circumstances – social, ritual, temporal and spatial.”

Educator Edmund O'Sullivan (1999) sees the inherent potential therein. Exploring healing gardens as liminal spaces that move beyond traditional landscape architecture into the realm of transformative learning can lead to “a deep structural shift in the basic premises of thoughts, feelings and actions... that dramatically alters our way of being in the world.”

WAITING IN LIMINAL SPACE

Healing gardens are intentionally designed to provide a physical space that supports people who are dealing with disruptions in their lives: the present is confusing and the future uncertain. A person with a challenging health issue of their own or of a loved one, is waiting in liminal space, suspended at the threshold of new experiences. When a healing garden is designed specifically to attend to this dynamic and exponential shift for people, it becomes a space for potential transformation. The Schneider Healing Garden at Seidman Cancer Center (SCC) is one such liminal space, located at the threshold that separates SCC from the vibrant city at the door. The overall concept for the garden as liminal space is lightly summarized by A.A. Milne's beloved childhood character, Christopher Robin, in the poem called "Halfway Down" (see page 20).

ALL SORTS OF FUNNY THOUGHTS

Gardens as transformative spaces are best designed using an iterative process that engages people – patients, family members, caregivers, volunteers, staff, donors and management – so the design of the place is meaningful to all involved. During the participatory input sessions for the Schneider Healing Garden, cancer survivors, family members and caregivers asked for an "oasis," a place to "take a breath." As design team leader, I interpreted the essence of this as an archetypal island, as described by Julie Messervy (1996). When we used the intention to create "somewhere else instead" in this new space, it provided clarity for each design decision.

Human-made transformative spaces often encompass four physical aspects: Gateway, Boundary, Centre and Path. Each of these aspects can provide opportunities for individuals to explore on their own, and they also relate to programming for learning opportunities in "communitas," as described by Devereaux. These gardens do not stand on their own as liminal, healing spaces. Healing experiences are created through the ongoing interaction of people, place and programming. Hanne De Jaegher and others (2007) describe this in "Participatory Sense-Making." Most interpersonal understanding, they write, is "done in the live, real-time, sometimes precarious, connecting between people in an ongoing social encounter." This is the world of dynamic co-emergence resulting in transformative learning.

"People" are all those who are involved in experiencing the garden. "Place" implies that the garden is not a leftover space between buildings, disconnected from what happens inside, but integral to the whole. The Schneider Healing Garden, for example, is adjacent to the front entry where it is seen immediately from the vehicular drop off. The garden is also



2

...healing gardens can open visitors to transformative learning. | ... les jardins thérapeutiques peuvent ouvrir les visiteurs à des connaissances qui les transforment.

PHOTOS 1 VIRGINIA BURT IN THE LABYRINTH: SCHNEIDER HEALING GARDEN AT CLEVELAND'S SEIDMAN CANCER CENTRE **2** FRACTAL GATE WITH CROCOSMIA | **1** VIRGINIA BURT DANS LE LABYRINTHE : JARDIN THÉRAPEUTIQUE SCHNEIDER DU CENTRE D'ONCOLOGIE SEIDMAN **2** PORTE FRACTALE AVEC CROCOSMIA.

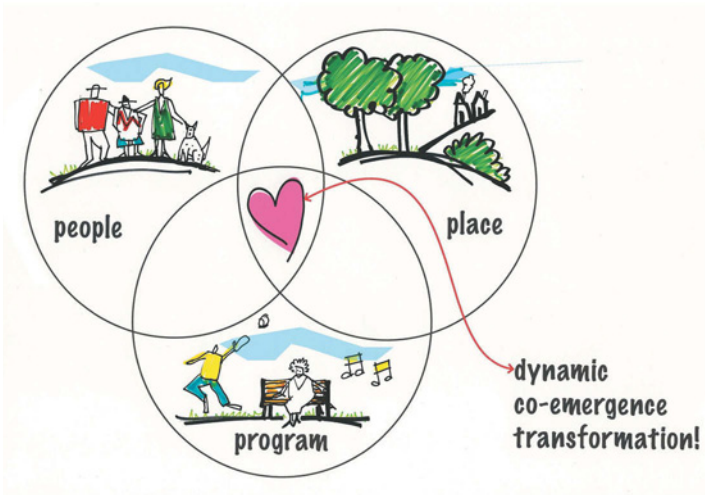
PHOTOS 1 + 2 BRAD FEINKNOPF PHOTOGRAPHY



3



4



PHOTOS 3 HAIKU WRITTEN IN CHALK ON THE LABYRINTH **4** WALKING MEDITATION **5** TRACING THE LABYRINTH **DRAWING:** HEALING EXPERIENCES ARE CREATED THROUGH INTERACTION | **3** HAIKU INSCRIT À LA CRAIE SUR LE LABYRINTHE **4** MARCHÉ MÉDITATIVE **5** TRACÉ DU LABYRINTHE **DESSIN :** LES EXPÉRIENCES THÉRAPEUTIQUES SONT CRÉÉES PAR L'INTERACTION

PHOTOS 3 TERRYLL KOETH **4** ERIC MULL PHOTOGRAPHY **5** PLAIN DEALER SKETCH: VIRGINIA BURT

seen from every floor above by approximately 2000 patients and caregivers in surrounding buildings. “Programming” includes the multiple and singular experiences that are actually held in the garden – everything from a single person connecting to the planned environment of the garden, to small group experiences to community-wide events.

HOW CONNECTIONS HAPPEN

Transformative learning can happen in so many ways.

1| In the Schneider Healing Garden, visitors become immediately immersed in unusual plants and trees as they make the journey down a ramped path to arrive at a carved stone labyrinth, whose center is an omphalos of possible experience – a metaphoric liminal space unto itself. Walks are programmed by the chaplains within Seidman Cancer Center, who invite individuals or groups to experience three “I’s”: Initiation (taking the first step, facing one’s fears), Illumination (arriving at the centre rose, achieving understanding), and Integration (following turns along the path, learning along the way). During one such walk held on the winter solstice, people carried candles signifying bringing light to the shortest day of the year. During and after the walk, a temporal experience in community, participants released emotions from tears to laughter, shared insights into their journey with cancer, and expressed a deepening understanding and clarity.



5

2| Air, Earth, Wind and Fire are represented in the Schneider Healing Garden through a variety of sculptural elements, arranged in four cardinal directions, to provide natural distraction and stimulate reflection. Staff held a harvest event for patients, families and caregivers to walk the labyrinth together and experience these sculptural elements as symbols of their journey, and then engage in writing Haiku poetry about their experiences in the garden.

3| A father of six young children, at Seidman Cancer Center for extended treatment, told me that he was unable to visit the Healing Garden due to his immune deficiency. However, each night he would look down from his sixth floor room and trace the labyrinth with his finger. (It is intentionally accented with lighting programmed to cycle through all seven colours of the chakras.) He described the experience as the one thing that helped him cope with the anxiety of treatment and remain strong with his children.

4| A self-employed businessman, diagnosed with cancer, was required to remain at Seidman Cancer Center for 30 days of treatment. During this time, he insisted that caregivers and family alike unhook his treatment port daily to allow him to go to the Healing Garden. His wife found me there by chance one day and said, "This space, this garden, is the only thing that kept my husband here. Thank you, thank you so much for creating it."

... each night he would look down from his sixth floor room and trace the labyrinth with his finger...

...chaque soir, il regardait par la fenêtre de sa chambre au sixième étage et traçait le labyrinthe avec son doigt...

5| A hospital administrator takes one of her difficult staff members out into the garden for meetings to physically and literally "clear the air."

Examples such as these tell us that healing gardens that are carefully designed and programmed for human experience and transition can lead to profound experiences and open visitors to the possibility of transformative learning. Devereux describes this well: "In our effort to understand place, [we find that] those liminal spaces... where visions can be had, where hierophanies can erupt, or boundaries...can be breached, are the greatest teachers."

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For references, visit LP+. Pour des références, visitez LP+.