

Mary SMAIL Dramatherapy, the Joanna Case Study and Working Online

In preparation for the 2014 Multi-Modality conference at which Philippa Weitz is speaking about working online she asked a number of clinicians from different modalities to comment on the Joanna case study.

Please be aware that this is "work in progress" for this conference and that each of the contributors will be continuing to work on their reflections for a book planned on the subject.

Section 1: In conversation -Mary Smail and Gill Jones

First of all, we start with an email conversation between Mary Smail of Sesame, and Gill Jones of OLT. This arose out of an OLT diploma group discussion.

The green text is Mary's. The black text is Gill's. The context is that at Philippa's request Gill wrote something about how she might working with dramatherapy, and Mary responded.

- GJ Your challenge is interesting. I would have said Body Therapy is probably one therapy that wouldn't work online as it relies on touch.
- MS It relies on touch yes and an animation of the symbols through a felt sense of two bodies working together in one place.
- GJ Drama therapy is an interesting one. I trained as a drama teacher and although I would say that groupwork based on psychodrama may not work online I wouldn't like to rule it out as I could imagine it working once technology has provided us with good webcam contact for groups (though the 'action' would probably be restricted to the shoulders up and that might limit its usefulness and probably mean it would never become a first choice platform).
- MS I think psychodrama might work a little more than Dramatherapy simply because a lot of that work is about taking on the role of a real person - you come at it through a thinking process. Dramatherapy, particularly the Jungian brand I subscribe to, works obliquely, letting the client story emerge through the symbols of enacted myths, or through body gesture - which eventually return to the narrative.
- GJ But one to one, I often use drama therapy with clients. Imagine asking a client to describe to you a formative experience in which they had felt shamed or humiliated. Discuss how, with the benefit of hindsight, they might re-work the scene to create a different outcome?
- MS That is a psychodrama exercise.
- GJ Then ask them to describe it again but this time with a new ending which transforms the outcome from one where they failed, to one where they are the hero.
- MS That exercise would be thought of as a psychodrama exercise. It works directly with the actual story. That would work on line .
- GJ Or to describe a formative experience from the point of view of another person who was involved at the time, or someone watching it take place.
- MS Again, working with the real story.
- GJ I've done this type of work both by email and in live session and both work equally well.

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- MS Can totally get that this would work fine.
- GJ Or ask them to describe the qualities they admire in a role model who could be, say, a character from a book, play, film or soap opera and suggest they pretend to be that person for 30 mins (if you're in live session, do it then and there) and ask what's different for them?
- MS So this is more akin to Dramatherapy. It is working through an imagined role – talking through the character and in so doing drawing information up about yourself. It could work but I imagine it would be very thin. There is no in room support from the therapist. Within Dramatherapy it is the job of the therapist to enhance the role by participating in the imagined material. The participation may be a holding from the outside or it may involve her/him taking on a role which enables the clients role to relate.
- GJ If it's by email, ask them to report back on the experience. Then discuss the differences and what opportunities they need to watch out for or create, to bring them into their lives.
- Or ask a client to write about themselves as if they were a character in a book or film (i.e. in the third person) - this can be a useful way of getting closer to some deeply distressing material as it's easier to write about an experience as if it's happening to someone else.
- MS YES. That is a primary premise of Dth. The “happening to someone else” which of course is you but you don't feel as exposed when you are speaking as someone else.
- GJ I have also used this technique to summarise my understanding of a client as I find I can state some things more directly if I am describing a third person because my description is always framed as a 'starting point' for further exploration and discussion.
- MS YES.
- GJ These ideas don't belong solely to drama therapy (narrative therapy and solution focused approaches both use something similar and probably several others that I can't think of right now) but I believe drama therapy can work online what medium you are using (text, audio or video).
- MS Some great thoughts here from Gill and a great start. I think I would need to try a Dth session on line to really know. I feel a little inspired having read Gill.
- One last thing, Dramatherapy works best in a group. Now there is a real challenge!!!

Section 2: Mary Smail provided the following understanding of dramatherapy:

However, to really answer this question one has to understand what Dramatherapy is. The brand I use is not based on a theatre model. It is Jungian based. Check out www.sesame-institute.org It deals with people's conscious material obliquely – through the metaphor, through embodied imagination and then returns people to what they have found symbolically to bring it back to the everyday. Although this involves prancing around and taking on roles, geographies, dilemmas in the art form

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it is also very dependant on body and soul both being present. It is a relational therapy which draws on elements of co creation, touch, being physically present.

So I am still rolling along with the question. How the hell could this work if I am in south London and you are in Hong Kong. I am not saying it cannot work. I am asking how could it work. White boards and 2 D stuff would work maybe for Art Therapy. It would be less likely to work for Dramatherapy.

Section 3: Sesame Dramatherapy with Joanna, Mary Smail comments:

As Dramatherapy uses an oblique approach, heading less into direct narrative and starting with the imagination, after setting up a contract with Joanna I would ask her to gather three images (postcards, cut outs from a magazine) which she senses are about her story and about which she would like to tell me for our first session. I would elect to use video-conferencing (VC) (eg VSee) if she were willing to use the camera. In the session I would invite her to arrange the pictures so that we could look at them and let her show me the imagined scenario. I would then offer her the choice of a random card which I would supply and show to her, drawing it "blind" from a selected pack of images. This card we would agree would represent a goal for the therapy. I would ask her to look at this card and through projection, imagination and synchronicity begin to see what was needed for our future sessions.

As Joanna has been abused I would be concerned about the disembodied nature of our VC sessions. I would be asking her if she would be willing to meet me but if that were not possible I would want to explore with her how movement could become part of the work – gesture, non-verbal communication and how we might work on this through the VC camera.

The aim of the work would be to move from indirect story to narrative and to build confidence in what lies ahead. I would affirm her wish to come off medication by building up her self-esteem and the potential creativity which she has already shown in choosing an Arts Therapy approach.