2012 Webinar Series

Tales of Transformation: Drama Therapy in Hospitals

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Tales of Transformation: Drama Therapy in Hospitals

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Drama Therapist
Drama therapy combines tools from the art of theatre, like story and role, with tools from psychotherapy to target treatment goals.
Drama therapy is …

… the methodical use of written, verbal, and non-verbal means of expression derived from the practices of theatre for the purposes of psychotherapy. A Drama Therapist works with clients to explore roles, create narrative, embody experience, and practice social interaction for insight, behavior change, and to promote the optimal healthy functioning of individuals and social systems.

— Institute for Therapy through the Arts, 2011
... active and experiential ... provides a context for participants to set goals and solve problems, express feelings or achieve catharsis. ... Inner experience can be actively explored and interpersonal relationship skills can be enhanced. Participants may expand their repertoire of roles to find that the roles they play in life are stronger and more varied.

— National Association for Drama Therapy, 2010
1. **Dramatic Projection** is a technique that allows the client to project his or her inner feelings and issues onto a roll or object.

2. **Personification and impersonation** describes two different dramatic forms in which the client expresses his or her personal material in the form of a role-play or an object.

3. **Interactive audience and witnessing** is the client, group, or therapist, in the role of the audience or witness.

4. **Playing** is an attitude of spontaneous problem-solving wherein objects are actively repurposed; new roles are tried out, there is the delineation of a playspace, and allowance for changes.
Nine Core Processes of Drama Therapy—Phil Jones, 1996

5. **Drama-therapeutic empathy and distancing** is the ability to engage or disengage personal problems and inner conflicts.

6. **Life-Drama Connection** is the process in which clients analyze their personal problems or conflicts with their dramatic projection.

7. **Transformation** is inherent in many aspects of the theatrical structure of telling a story and within play.

8. **Embodiment** is physical expression of personal material, actual or envisioned.

9. **Therapeutic Performance Processes** are the therapeutic use of a theatrical performance to work through specific themes and issues.
Who can benefit?


- Patients who seem to have a great deal they are trying to express, verbally, vocally, via gestures, or through another art form.
Who can benefit?

- Patients who have goals in functional movement, cognition, speech, and/or social interaction but who have difficulty with motivating and sustaining needed therapeutic activity.

- Patients who engage in play, storytelling, or joke-telling in any form, or express interest in the same.
Who can benefit?

- Patients actively expressing unmet social-emotional needs.
- Patients who talk about the news, TV, movies, books they are reading, etc.
- Patients who may not be able to speak but can vocalize or otherwise seek to engage in purposeful reciprocal communication.
When to consult?

- When the content of a patient’s communication seems to contain a great deal of meaning but the clinician is uncertain how to process or use that information.
- When you are seeking motivational content for a patient.
- When you believe the exploration of biographical or imagined drama content may assist a patient but you are unsure how to activate that content.
Goals of Drama Therapy in Hospital Settings

To help patients experience improvement in the following areas:
Agency — a key social-emotional component of mental health; the patient’s sense of power and control over their lives to some extent, especially important in this is the ability to determine and assign meaning to things.

Pain Management — provided through the mechanism of distraction, by anxiety reduction, or by setting positive value context for the experience.

Functional Tasks:
- Movement — duration and articulation
- Cognition — identification, organization, and recall
- Social Interaction — initiation, reciprocity, and cooperation
Research
Agency & Mental Health


- Stories seem to be the baseline way in which we approach making order out of the world. We are constantly doing this interpretative and reconstructive thing as we make sense of our lives.

- The best way to understand our sense of self is as a story. There are better and worse ways of telling those stories, better and worse in terms of their mental health implications.
We looked at the evolution of the themes in their stories alongside the evolution of their mental health.

One of the key themes that showed up was “agency,” the way you portray the main character in your story. So, are you portraying the main character, i.e., you as someone who’s in the driver seat of their experiences or really being battered around at the whims of external circumstances?

We saw that agency increased across people who got better over the course of therapy. But we also found that the stories started to change before people got better. So it's not that the storied change was some kind of side effect they're feeling better, the stories actually shifted first.
“I can't control the things that happened to me, but I can control the meaning that I make of the things that happened to me.” —Jonathan M. Adler, PhD

Helping patients in this process, creating meaning from the merger of imagination and experience, is the work of a Drama Therapist.
Those with higher reported levels of anxiety report more pain symptoms than counterparts low in anxiety.
The Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale-Revised (CMAS-R) was the standardized psychological instrument utilized for this study. Twenty-eight anxiety and nine lie items were administered to ten subjects, five members of the experimental group and five members of a control group. The subjects of the control group were each administered two trials of the CMAS-R, pre-test and post-test, and received no dramatherapy intervention.
Results, including mean scores and standard deviation scores, were compared within and between the experimental and control groups. In addition, mean and standard deviation scores for the subjects in this study were compared with those of the original studies (N = 167) by the authors (Reynolds and Richmond 1978).
The pre-test results of the experimental group yielded a group mean of 16.6 for the 28 anxiety items with a standard deviation of 1.8. Post-test results of dramatherapy indicated a significant decrease on the anxiety scale, with a mean score of 12.8 and a standard deviation of 6.1. Thus, the desired effect of reducing anxiety/stress was achieved for the experimental group (Figure A.1).

In contrast, mean pre-test score of the control group was 14.2 with a standard deviation of 5.2. Post-test scores for this group without dramatherapy were 15.2 with a standard deviation 4.8; no significant change.
Drama Therapy Interventions

What you may see in a drama therapy session.

Within these the therapist will plan to include elements specifically for work on individual and group therapy goals, and, in practice, may make spontaneous adaptations to the chosen intervention to meet client needs.
Selecting Degree of Distance in Applying “What if …?”

- **Hitting Home**
  - “I” Drama
  - Psychodrama, Playback.

- **Close to Home**
  - “I” in a Role
  - Role Selection Method, Role Play

- **At a Distance**
  - He/She/It/They Drama
  - Play, Story, Figures, Creating, Reading and Enacting Scripted Plays

- **Distance of Group**
  - We/Us Drama
  - Sociodrama, Ensemble Play-Creation
DRAMATIC THERAPY INTERVENTIONS

- Creative Visualization
- Fill-In-the-Blank Style Improvised Story.
- Role Method with Role Cards
- Theatre Games and Exercises – such games generally focus on specific tasks such as
  - Identifying and replicating an emotion.
  - Attending to what others are doing and mirroring or building off what they are doing
  - Recalling what someone else has said or done,
  - Working on vocal expression, projection, and articulation, or exaggerating or aiding a vocal response with physical gesture,
  - Making a comparison or association.
DRAMA THERAPY INTERVENTIONS

- Storytelling through combination of Sequential Art/Comics and active enactment.
- Role play.
- Poetry creation.
- Recitation/Enactment/Interpretation of Literature.
- Retelling/Enactment of Familiar Stories.
- Spectrograms – interactive diagrams of choices along a spectrum.
- Sociograms – interactive diagram of social connections.
- Story and Character development elaborated from Projective Images – Art, Postcards, Photographs, Objects, or Hats and/or costume pieces.
DRAMA THERAPY INTERVENTIONS

- Story told through Figurines.
- Story told through Puppets.
- Story told through Objects used as if they were puppets.
- Embodiment – physical representation of an abstract idea or feeling.
- Enactment – playing out a person’s thoughts, feelings, imaginary circumstances, or identified social situation. This can be scripted or improvised (or scripted out of an improvisation and then re-enacted).
- Deroling.
- Story summation and titling.
# Projective Tools by Degree of Distance

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Under-distanced Projective Tools</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Role taking</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Enactment</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Space containers (masking tape, hula hoops...)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Costumes</td>
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<td>• Masks</td>
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<tr>
<th>Over-distanced Projective Tools</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Puppets</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Figurines</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Toy sets such as Legos</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Art Images/Postcards</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Props</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Storymaking</td>
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Case Examples

Client recovering from Guillain–Barré syndrome demonstrated consistent improved duration in stander with use of creative visualization of vacation trips, combined with social component of taking others along on that envisioned journey, describing it in detail with the encouragement, guidance, and participation of the drama therapist.
Case Examples

Patients with degenerative neurological conditions have consistently shown the ability to use costumes and props, as well as verbal and gestural cues to construct and recall the narrative of a story including proper names as well as location and object names, and recall a sequence of events.

While these stories exercise functional tasks in cognition and social interaction, they also serve and important social-emotional purpose. The positive reinforcers of smiles and laughter are frequently present in these groups, and roles are taken that give renewed social status and power.
Case Examples

An adult recovering from a traumatic brain injury, who was a relatively recent immigrant to the United States from Africa, was able to cast himself in the role of two classic Trickster characters and play out teaching a lesson to a rather arrogantly uniformly uniformed tourist in Africa.

He then identified the animal characteristics he felt he wanted to keep close to heart (playfulness and determination he identified with a monkey) and the qualities he wanted to keep at a distance (noting the excessive pride and laziness he felt was represented by a lion).
Case Examples

- A Pediatric care patient, age 7, showed signs of distress and agitation, disregarded attempts of peers and staff to engage with him, and instead focused on unwrapping the protective bindings from his legs.

- When given a mask and the role of a pirate, and given the opportunity to pretend his wheelchair was a pirate ship, and given the permission to pretend that the hallway of the pediatric floor was an ocean, the rooms were islands, and signs up in rooms and halls were treasure maps, this child’s manner changed.

- Signs of distress and agitated attention to his legs decreased, and attention to his peer and the therapist increased along with an improvement in his visible mood.
Case Examples

A father of two recovering from a traumatic brain injury was able to construct and recall a fairy tale that he was then able to relate to his children when they came to visit him.

It was the tale of a scary and powerful dragon who breathed fire over the land until one day something caught in his throat and he fell to the ground. He went to a wizard for help. The wizard cast a spell that removed the throat problem but made him into a duck. He asked the wizard to change him back the way he was but the wizard said that could not happen. In his new life as a duck he discovered that while he could not fly he was very popular with all the children of the village who loved his funny voice and so he was happy with his new life playing with the children of the village.
Drama Therapy Resources

- The Institute for Therapy through the Arts, itachicago.org
- National Association for Drama Therapy: nadt.org
- Drama therapy in the UK: dramatherapy.net
- Drama Therapy Blog: dramatherapycentral.com
- For books and articles about drama therapy, please visit: nadt.org/what-is-drama-therapy/bibliography
References


