

BAPT Annual Conference, 6 June 2015, Aston University, Birmingham

Report

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The conference was based around the theme of 'Exploring Metaphors and Symbols in Dramatic play' and in the morning three key speakers: Dr Anna Seymour, David Le Vay and Simon Kerr Edwards gave their presentations. Dr Seymour focused on the usage of dramatic play in exploring issues of adoption and attachment and she illustrated this through orchestrating an experiential play including some participants from the audience. Her vast knowledge of drama therapy underpinned by her personal experience as an adoptive parent helped me to reflect about dramatic metaphors that children and young people accessing my Play Therapy sessions might use to communicate their own life experiences and also to reveal their different styles of attachments. I was able to learn from Dr Seymour's best practice how I would improve my own Play Therapy practice.

Dr Seymour's thought provoking presentation was followed by David le Vay exploration of the metaphors, stories and symbols that can emerge in the dramatic play of children who have experienced trauma and abuse. David used the metaphor of a Greek myth of Ariadne to help us think how traumatised children, in the absence of words, find ways to communicate their experiences. He drew his examples from a rich array of clinical material from children's dramatic play. After introducing us to the metaphors, stories and

symbols of children he had worked with he had then demonstrated how the children's stories became a containing vehicle for their traumatic experiences. Their play full of rich metaphors enabled them to create enough distance so the trauma and abuse would not threaten to overwhelm their fragile sense of self. David's rich clinical presentation enabled me to reflect and evaluate my own practice and make some improvements.

The morning session ended with a lively presentation on improvisation by Simon Kerr Edwards. He helped me to think about the importance of spontaneity and being in here and now with the child but also the dilemmas faced by play therapists during this process e.g. listening to ones internal supervisor, taking a chance, accepting of what is on offer, listening to one's body senses, looking for what is absent, trusting the process, stepping back, being playful and allowing despair. Simon's presentation helped me to think about the theoretical base of my Play Therapy practice and reminded me of the importance of Play Therapy principles.

After lunch I had joined a workshop led by David Le Vay who continued his theme of the myth of Ariadne and engaged us in some dramatic play and creative story-making ourselves. Each of us was asked to create a drawing based on the myth, and share this in groups of three, then six and at last eight people. During the process of reflection and discussion we explored the symbols and the metaphors we used in our drawings as a way of expressing significant themes in therapy with our own children. At the end each group created a play based on these themes which was then performed by the

groups in front of the other workshop participants. I gained a great insight into the Play Therapy process through the group experience and was reminded of the power of Play Therapy.

Overall, a wonderful experience of sharing Play Therapy ideas, reflecting and learning from each other practice and also a chance of networking in between sessions and sourcing some Play Therapy resources.