

Creative Therapies

A psychodynamic
approach within
occupational therapy

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up activities. On carrying out a session in woodland we have used the walk to the chosen spot in the woods to gather material for the session – fir cones, bracken, fallen branches and so on. The issues of privacy and anonymity are important. Group members need to know where they are going as they may be concerned about meeting someone they know from outside the therapy situation and need to be encouraged to address this as appropriate. Depending on the work setting, some clients may be a risk to themselves or others and a risk assessment might be an issue for taking patients outside the clinical setting.

In this section we have encouraged experimentation with some less conventional ideas. Many of these are activities which take place outside the privacy of a therapy room with a closed door, and as a result there may be an issue around how others perceive them. Here we are not thinking about the clients we are working with, who will have been party to the total experience and will have an awareness of the purpose and benefits. We are thinking about colleagues who may catch only glimpses of a session or soundbites of what has taken place. For us, disappearing into the city for the afternoon or wandering around the building with a wizard's hat on our head did raise some questions from colleagues and also some comments about doing some 'proper teaching'! This issue is discussed further in Chapter 6, but it is timely at this point to consider how our work in creative therapies is perceived by others. Occupational therapy has suffered from the perceptions of others because superficially what we do looks simple and the real experience of therapy is often not observed through glimpses of our practice, so we have to be more outspoken about the meaning of what we are doing. Creative therapies, as a technique used in occupational therapy, is more at risk of this than some of the other techniques we use. It can look so much like just having fun or playing around with activity. Inherent in this is that the psychodynamic processes which occur take some unravelling and are rarely explicit. Where this might be an issue we very strongly encourage you to take the opportunity to explain to colleagues what you are doing before and after sessions. This explanation should not be merely from a structural perspective – 'I've been walking around the building with a wizard's hat on'. It should offer the perspective of what the actual meaning of the event was – 'It was about helping the group prepare for finishing the course and leaving their peers and this is how we did it ...'. We have a professional responsibility to inform others about our practice. Being explicit in describing our work in this way serves to educate and leads to greater understanding; the benefits of this are clear.

Part of the thrill of writing this book for us has been discovering new things. One particularly exciting discovery has been 'OH cards' and their counterparts 'Saga', 'Ecco', 'Habitat' and 'Persona'. These are a new idea for creative therapy practice and we feel that these have huge potential. For these reasons we have decided to describe them and explore some of their potential in detail.

OH cards and their counterparts

In this section we explore the use of 'OH cards' and their counterparts 'Saga', 'Ecco', 'Habitat' and 'Persona'. These are the cards we are familiar with but more

sets are steadily being added to the collection and we know that there are also packs called 'Morena', 'Quisine' and 'Orca', of which we do not have experience. Collectively, these could be termed cards of interaction or association as it is on these levels that they work (Kirschke, 1997). They are basically a game but one of co-operation and sharing rather than competition and achievement. There are no rules to the game; it is not constrained by rights and wrongs or by a defined objective; it is open to the experience of the players, allowing them to find their own course. The only guidance that the cards have is a set of etiquette, which really equates to what we would know as ground rules. This provides a framework within which to work, giving the necessary security for personal disclosure. The etiquette secures confidentiality and suggests that there are no correct interpretations of the cards. It also stresses the importance of ownership of the experience, achieved through using 'I' rather than 'one' or 'you'. It encourages players to work in the present, the experience of now, using the past only in as much as it impacts on the present. Respect should be shown for fellow players, who should not interrupt or offer alternative interpretations. Their role is to listen carefully to what the others have to say.

The cards work to foster interaction and communication between players and within the self. They allow the players to interact with other parts of their psyche, to connect with aspects of their self which may be deeply rooted or hidden. The cards achieve this through their associative powers. They are made up of pictures and symbols which the player cannot help but associate with. If they are open and receptive to this experience, the associations may be acknowledged and their meanings for the individual's life explored. The sets can be used on a variety of levels and this is part of their strength. On one level the players can remain personally detached from the experience, using the cards very much as a game, but on another level the cards can provide a route into the unconscious and the deeper parts of the soul. This is achieved through tapping into the imagination and creativity of the individual. With all of these qualities we see that they fit very comfortably as a tool for the creative therapy approach.

While each set of cards can foster the same processes – those of interaction and association – they each have a unique 'feel' or 'flavour'. Because of this they may lend themselves to a different route for this process. We will try to convey a little of the flavour of each of the sets that we are familiar with. With this we add a disclaimer: these cards are very rich and yet subtle, they go beyond verbal communication and as such trying to describe them through words loses something of their essence. We feel very excited and inspired by these cards and acknowledge that we have only nibbled around the edge of their full potential. We encourage you to explore this resource for yourself and provide some contact details for this in the Appendix.

OH cards

The OH cards contain two packs of cards. The first set comprises 88 word cards, each containing a different word. Some initially appear more emotive than others

– ‘cycle’, ‘home’, ‘humiliation’, ‘fear’ – yet their association for the individual using them may be very emotionally laden regardless of their first impression. The second pack consists of 88 picture cards. These again are varied, covering a whole range of scenes and images. Examples of cards from these two packs are shown in Figure 5.3. The sets can be used separately or together to access various levels of consciousness. The pictures bypass rational understanding while the words address the intellect (Kirschke, 1997). Used together, by placing the picture inside the word card, our mind takes a moment to adjust to the combination (Kirschke, 1997). The cards are selected blindly, one from each pack, and turned face up on the table for all to see. Initially the word doesn’t seem to fit with the picture; it takes a moment and then something happens. When using these cards we have been very aware that sometimes a picture, or a word, or most often the two together, sparks a connection in our mind, something we had previously been unaware of. Our defences have been bypassed – or, as Jung would state, the false mask of the persona is shed. This is a surprising feeling, a sensitive and a moving one.

Another part of the experience of playing is listening to what the other players have to say about the cards they have selected. This experience forms an association on another level, as in some way we can often identify with the feelings that the other person is expressing. This identification may provide the stimulus for communication on a more personal level between the players involved.

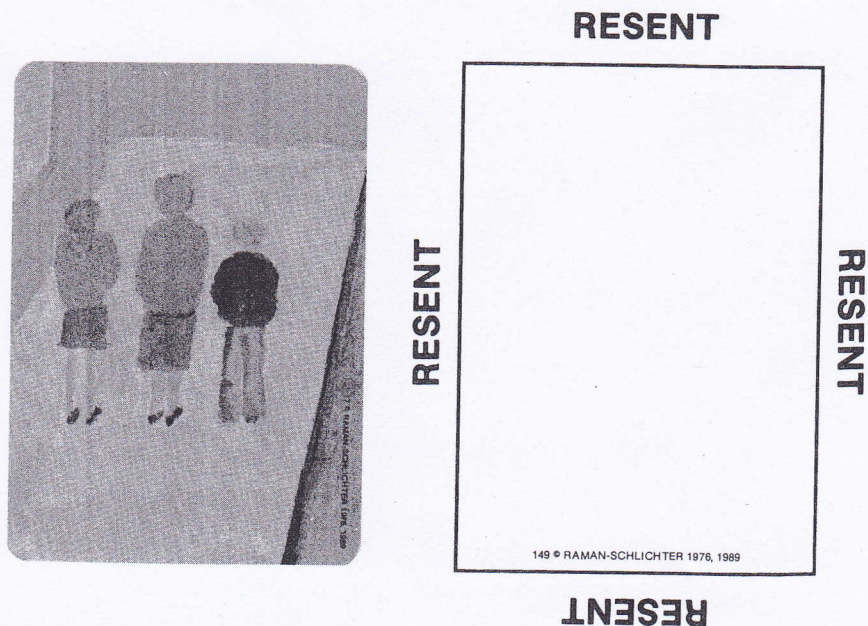


Figure 5.3 OH cards

(OH picture card 17, word card 149 from the set of OH cards by Ely Raman, reproduced with permission of Moritz Egetmeyer, OH Publishing)

Saga

This consists of one set of cards. The pictures relate to mythology, fairytale and legend, which Kirschke (1997) suggests tell something of our personal history as well as our collective history, a link here to Jung's collective unconscious. Used individually we can all connect in some way with the image; for example, a picture of a castle with a drawbridge may associate with feelings of defence, bringing up the drawbridge to protect oneself. The cards can be used through story making. Players may blindly take a card and construct their own myth, fairytale or legend. This may be spoken or written, with the story developed in the first person to keep it personal. If this is a spontaneous act without intellectual filtering, the story developed will in itself say something about the individual.

Ecco

These cards are immediately different from the others as they are exclusively formed of abstract images which are very bright and colourful. Because of their abstract nature they are open to a uniquely personal interpretation. Used with the word cards of the OH set the contrast can be very interesting, the abstract with the literal really challenges the mind.

Habitat

This set contains pictures of man interacting with his environment. The common theme is of the impact man is having on the natural environment and its fragility. Again the cards are open to personal interpretation, which communicates something of the individual's inner world. Like the other cards they can be played in a variety of ways – as an individual narrative, to develop stories between players or in combination with the word cards of the OH set.

Persona

Persona are the final set of cards that we have used and again have a unique flavour. This set is made up of two packs of cards. The first consists of portrait images – male, female, a variety of ages and cultures. The second set are relationship cards, depicted by dots connected by arrows. The number of dots and their sizes, the shape, thickness and solidity of the arrows vary. A format we have used for playing these cards is where players blindly take one relationship card and then select a corresponding number of portrait cards to match the dots on the first card. The player then takes their time to construct a relationship between these portraits, perhaps developing it to consider the arrangement and form of the arrows. This construction forms an association; it has arisen from that player and has personal meaning for them. A development from this, suggested by Kirschke (1997), is that the cards can be used for the players to experiment at being someone else, to try out an alternative role and to explore a different range of relationships. This process may provide insight into the player's current situation and be an early step in a process of change.

All of the above cards are very versatile in their use. They offer another medium and activity to the repertoire of creative therapies. Most of the descriptions above suggest using them as a catalyst to verbal expression but they could effectively be used to spark communication through other creative processes – text and verse, paper and paint, clay and sculpture, sound and rhythm, body and movement. These cards of interaction and association have a clear potential to facilitate psychodynamic processes at a number of levels. Because of this they have a value at all stages of the process of change. They are, however, very powerful, and we urge you to use them with sensitivity and awareness. We have been surprised by the level of emotion they have raised, and suggest that they be introduced when a secure level of working has been reached.

Summary

This final section focuses on the use of the environment and new ideas. It encourages us to be open to new and different opportunities, and to actively seek them out when they are appropriate. We feel that being receptive to new ideas is a very freeing experience, and one which complements our way of working within creative therapies. It challenges preconceived thoughts and boundaries, makes use of the unexpected, and allows us to use our creativity in adapting, exploring and experiencing fresh ways of working. We have considered the resources within the surrounding environment, urging the exploration of galleries, cities, woods and open spaces to add a different dimension to working creatively. We have considered fresh ideas – ‘Flubbadub experience’, psychodynamic photography, even cake icing. Finally we have considered a new resource, the OH cards and their counterparts, which have opened fresh routes for us to explore.

CONCLUSION

Part 2 has focused on the creative media we use as our tools within creative therapy. This is not an exhaustive list, as we have found that our ideas have changed from time to time, and that we need to be very open minded about our choice of media. We have attempted to move away from preconceived ideas that we will be using art, music, drama, because we have found these terms constraining, preferring to open them up to allow freedom of expression to creep into the titles. Somehow this suits our way of working and the ways in which we think the creative media may be considered.

In each section we have attempted to address the resources required for working in this way, the qualities that might be provided by the media and the process of using them. We have stressed the need to value the experience, using the process of working rather than focusing on completing an end product. There are times when the use of media is daunting, or may bring back childhood memories, so we have recognised the importance of valuing the individual at every stage, facilitating their work within the activity and achieving an awareness of the process of self-discovery, self-exploration, self-determination and self-help.

In our first chapter we stressed the underlying theme of creativity, recognising the place this takes not only within the activities we use but also within ourselves as individuals. This chapter relies on the creativity of the therapist in making media accessible for use, and on the creativity of those who are undertaking the experience, freeing their thoughts and actions to achieve change.

We have tried to be creative in the ways we have presented the media. It is not easy to capture the excitement and pleasure of working in creative therapies, as they are so experiential, so there are times when grasping their essence is difficult to achieve in words. Simply by definition they move beyond the boundaries we are familiar with, allowing us to explore, create, adapt and adjust until we have an opportunity which provides a route for psychodynamic working. Yet they can be easily misunderstood. We have all suffered from a session being perceived on a superficial level as the underneath, where the work is taking place, is invisible and can go unrecognised. For this reason we have to be clear about why we are using a medium within creative therapies, and how we use it to shift what is seen as activity from one end of the continuum presented in Figure 1.1 to the other. In this way we are using our creative activity to turn the creative experience into creative therapy.

Our final section focuses on new ideas, a fitting criterion to explore as using creative media is all about accessing new ideas. Our thoughts are constantly challenged about the ways in which media can provide themes for sessions. Our feeling is that as long as a medium can be used creatively, allowing the key criteria to be found within it, then it provides a suitable route.

We hope that this chapter will inspire you to view creative media with fresh eyes, and that this will be reflected in the ways you incorporate them within your work.

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