



The Drama Therapy Core Processes: A Journey Across Continents

Jane Bourne, Rinat Feniger-Schaal, Becky Wilburn, Jason S. Frydman, Angelle Cook and Alexandru Berceanu

This panel explores the evolving understanding of the ‘core processes’ in drama therapy, first articulated by Phil Jones (1996, 2021), who identified nine processes: dramatic projection, embodiment, empathy and distancing, life-drama connection, playing, personification and impersonation, role playing and transformation, and the interactive audience and witnessing, as foundations for therapeutic change across drama therapy. These processes, Jones proposed, traverse modalities and enable transformation through creative and aesthetic engagement.

Building on this seminal contribution, the North American Drama Therapy Association’s Core Processes Research Subcommittee conducted a Delphi study (Frydman et al., 2022), refining the framework to seven core processes. Their work has since culminated in the Drama Therapy Core Process Coding System (DT-CPCS), developed through a three-year, multi-phase research project to empirically define observable mechanisms of change in drama therapy. The DT-CPCS identifies a central core process—*engagement in dramatic reality*—manifesting in two forms (liminal and projective) and across five experiential states. It further delineates five observable processes: dramatic embodiment, dramatic play, witnessing, reflection *in* dramatic reality, and reflection *on* dramatic reality, offering a standardized framework for research, training, and clinical evaluation.

Extending this inquiry across cultural contexts, the European research team undertook a parallel Delphi investigation to examine how these processes are perceived, prioritized, and adapted within diverse European practices.

Bringing together the North American and European research teams alongside Professor Phil Jones, this panel offers a rare opportunity to compare findings, methodological approaches, and emergent themes that illuminate the pluralities of drama therapy practice across continents. Framed within ECARTE 2026’s Ithaca-inspired theme, the panel invites



reflection on research as a shared journey, an odyssey of encounter, questioning, and transformation, and considers how the core processes may serve as a compass for future cross-cultural collaboration in the arts therapies.

The panel will invite discussion on how the core processes can serve as a compass for practitioners and researchers, guiding training, supervision, and future cross-cultural collaboration within the arts therapies.

Biography

Jane Bourne, PhD, is a National Institute of Health Research Postdoctoral Fellow and Clinical Academic working in the NHS, with an honorary position at Newcastle University. She is a lecturer, supervisor, and accredited CBT therapist, EMDR practitioner, and Dramatherapist. Her research focus is on developing and evaluating creative and psychological interventions for people affected by trauma, learning disabilities and mental health challenges. She integrates her clinical practice and arts-based methods to enhance recovery and engagement.

Rinat Feniger-Schaal, PhD, is a senior lecturer (tenured) at the School of Creative Arts Therapies, University of Haifa, Israel, where she established the MA program in Drama Therapy and Psychodrama. She brings together multiple professional identities as a certified drama therapist (registered supervisor), medical clown, and developmental psychologist. Her research focuses on the intersection of clinical practice and empirical investigation, in particular, exploring the relationships between play, playfulness, drama, movement, and attachment theory. With extensive clinical experience in both public and private settings, she specializes in working with individuals with cognitive impairment and mental health challenges. Dr. Feniger-Schaal has secured significant research grants, presented internationally, and published widely in peer-reviewed journals

Becky Wilburn is a dramatherapist with over 20 years of experience, known for bringing her playful energy into both therapy sessions and professional spaces. She's worked a lot with children and young people, helping them explore difficult or traumatic experiences through dramatherapy. In 2022, Becky began teaching on the MA Dramatherapy course at Anglia Ruskin University, an opportunity that reignited her curiosity about the core processes, a



subject she first explored during her undergraduate studies in 1997. Becky is passionate about bridging the gap between clinical practice and academic research, with a particular interest in developing and sharing practice-based knowledge within the field of dramatherapy.

Jason S. Frydman, PhD, RDT/BCT, NCSP is a licensed psychologist, state and nationally certified school psychologist, and registered dramatherapist/board-certified trainer with the NADTA. He is an associate professor in the expressive therapies doctoral program at Lesley University. At Lesley, Dr. Frydman advises doctoral students in expressive therapies and education, and psychology, and co-chairs the IRB. He is the director for the research lab: The Collaborative for Creative Arts Therapies in Schools (C-CATIS), is the immediate-past NADTA Research Chair, and is the recipient of the 2023 Research Award from the NADTA. In addition, Dr. Frydman serves on the editorial boards of *Drama Therapy Review*, *School Psychology Review*, *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma*, and is the Associate Editor for General Topics for the APA journal, *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*.

Angelle Cook, (she/her), PhD, is a registered drama therapist (RDT) and a board-certified trainer (BCT) with the NADTA. Dr. Cook heads the dis/ability research lab at Lesley University, where she is a visiting instructor. She also teaches at New York University. Angelle is the Clinical Director, supervising clinicians, at A Place To Be, a local nonprofit where she lives. Dr. Cook is the Managing Editor for *Drama Therapy Review*, as well as the current Research Chair for the NADTA. Angelle runs her own private practice in Virginia working with clients through the Disability Justice lens and Critical Feminist Theory framework.

Alexandru Berceanu, PhD is an Associate Professor at UNATC I.L. Caragiale Bucharest, a director and writer conducting research on the neurobiological substrates of theatre, play, and immersive environments in health and creativity-oriented contexts. He initiated T-NET, an improvisational theatre method for teenagers who have experienced adverse life events, and the CINETic Centre at UNATC for interdisciplinary research in performing arts, media, and film.

Please note that although not present at the conference, it's important we acknowledge our research team colleagues. Callin Armstrong, Rebecca Versaci and Larry Ludlow from the North American Research Team. Professor Johannes Junker and Dr Ellie Keiller from the European Research Team.



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