

Returning the soul to dramatherapy: mining the wisdom from our identities, narratives and memories through dramatic play.

Drew Bird and Katie Smith

As dramatherapists we need a dynamic orientation that sustains and nurtures our ability to attune to the client's needs. Winnicott (2005) argued that psychotherapy was bringing the client into a playful encounter with the therapist. A flexible orientation within the therapeutic alliance is key to play and dramatic improvisation, yet the human condition is such that we tend to cling to ideas and memories that can make us resistant to new perspectives. The workshop will introduce *a/r/tography*, a practitioner led research methodology, that offers a fluid orientation to understanding our shifting identities as artists, researchers and dramatherapists (Leblanc, Davidson, Rhu and Irwin, 2015). The philosophical position of *a/r/tography* is that knowledge is not static but dynamic and created in relation to self and others. An evolving identity is dependent on our creating new narratives and wisdom from our past memories and experiences, so that they are culturally appropriated into present day relationships. We need to keep re-authoring new narratives about our identities and memories that empower us to find new relationships with the artist, researcher and therapist (White and Epstein, 1990) so we remain receptive to the co-creative encounter within the therapeutic alliance. Engaging with our art form as dramatherapists facilitates emotional health, but failure to develop ourselves as artists can result in losing our soul and becoming stagnant (Allen, 1992). McNiff (1989) argues that the effectiveness of our practice as arts therapists is dependent on the relationship with our art form. The workshop will explore our unique epistemology of the imagination using play, dramatic improvisation and storytelling in order to develop our special intelligence as dramatherapists (McNiff, 1998). Using a living inquiry, participants will develop a deeper understanding of themselves as artists and therapists and the importance of a non-dualistic orientation so we can more fully attune to our clients.

Biography

Drew Bird, Ph.D., is senior lecturer on the MA dramatherapy programme and lead for doctorate research in therapeutic arts at the University of Derby. He is the editor of *Dramatherapy*, the journal of the British Association of Dramatherapists (BADth). His background is in working with children and young people who have experienced trauma and in the field of adult mental health. Recent research interests and publications have focused on heuristic inquiry, arts-based research, *a/r/tography* and dramatic improvisation and performance as research into therapy and teaching practice.

Kate Smith is a qualified dramatherapist, supervisor and senior lecturer. She now works at the University of Derby as Programme Lead of the Dramatherapy Master's Degree as well as maintaining clinical work both within the NHS and with private clients. Her main area of research and clinical background is working within forensic mental health.

Recent publications and conference presentations

Publications

Smith, K. (2019). Story, Shadow, Shame and Risk: Dramatherapy with male personality disordered sexual offenders in medium secure forensic settings. In: Leibmann, M. and Hastilow, S. (eds.) *Arts and Play Therapies with Sexual Offenders*. London: Jessica Kingsley (In press).

Bird, D. and Tozer, K. (2016). Towards a drama therapy pedagogy: An *a/r/tographic* study using dramatic improvisation. *Drama Therapy Review* 2(2), pp. 273–284.

Bird, D. and Tozer, K. (2018). An a/r/tographic exploration of engagement in theatrical performance: what does this mean for the student/teacher relationship. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*. 16(3), pp. 241-25

Bird, D. (2019) How can arts-based research in dramatic performance illuminate understanding of the therapeutic relationship? *Drama Therapy Review*, 5 (2), pp.279-292.

2019: (Bird, D.) Paper presentation: 'What role can myth play exploring the Buddha's teaching on the existential nature of the human condition?' ECArTE conference in Alcala, Spain.