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Surely I am in the wrong place?

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Symposium,
Inscape.

Work in progress: Surely I am in the wrong place?

Holly Edworthy

I seem to have been bewitched by my clientele. These children range in ages and disabilities, some have no labels as such. I have been working with children at one school now for nearly a year. These are children have special needs. I also have been working at a second school for a considerable amount of time with mainstream children. I am constantly surprised at the work the children do with me and sometimes I am dumbfounded. Dumbfounded that is, by the extent that these children have been through. Each of the children have their story and neither one is more important than the other.

The work in the Art Therapy sessions I do with these children has made an impact on me in many ways. Some of the children have held my heart still beating in their hand. I was once working with a child named Georgia who was constantly in trouble. She had been diagnosed with the disorder Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. When I was working with her most intensely, she had recently come out of hospital after having an abscess removed from her brain; she was also coming to school with a lot of bruises.

I allowed her to hold my heart in her hand. She did this wearing a crown she had made in one of our sessions, which allowed her to change into the Queen of hearts. This queen was my ruler and she told me what I was allowed to do and what I could not do. I was seated in the corner of the room when the queen told me she had my heart. My eyes where closed and I was not permitted to move. The queen gave me orders as she wrote and drew on the board things I was not permitted to see.
It is worth noting here that at Georgia's school when a child was in trouble they were to sit in a certain spot in the room with a teacher present. The child was then not allowed to converse with the teacher, it was called time out. I thought it was incredibly powerful for Georgia to be able to re-arrange this equation so that I, the adult was the one now placed in the corner of the room.
She told me, "Face the wall, don't move, sit still!"

Then she took my heart and also my brain, the Queen of Hearts was fearsome. At the time I felt sincerely frightened by this queen. I also felt full of feeling for Georgia and my heart was taken somehow.

I find working with children a moving experience and also a privilege. I feel as if childhood is a crucial time to work with someone as they are still forming as it were. It is these early stages of childhood that I personally believe fragility lies.

Clark Moustakas discusses a way, in which a therapist may work with children, 'He regards every situation as a unique, living experience which contains its own requirements and its own method or techniques. The only thing the therapist can do for the child is help him gradually to be himself and make creative, responsible use of his capacities and abilities. Although interpretation and explanation are sometimes used in this therapy, it is the child's new experiencing of himself, with a person who

accepts him as he is, that gives clarifying value to these methods' I find this to be an admirable way to work with children. It is also a way I find, that gives a sense of gratification to the children I have worked with.

I have come from a Fine Art background therefore I know the benefit I find through the creation of my own work. It is not only the sense of achievement I gain from the work if I find it to be successful but also the meditative space I enter when I am creative. I heard about Art Therapy during my Fine Art course at RMIT, Melbourne. It took me a few years after my bachelor degree was completed to decide this was the direction I wanted to go in. I have admittedly battled with the idea of being an Artist who practices Art Therapy yet I think I have reached some point of arrival. That is, that I wish to always hold the space carefully for my own work. That is why I am very enthused at the chance to hopefully produce a piece of work I feel is complete and to exhibit once more.

What also led me in the direction of Art Therapy was the work I have done as a carer. When I was working as a carer I often thought about what might happen if I were able to engage the person I was caring for creatively. It hit me particularly hard when I worked with a woman dying of Fahrs disease in a residential home. I wanted to ask her if there was anything she wished to do creatively rather than watching the television. It became obvious that I had the urge to want to do creative things with the people I worked with rather than carer duties. I am aware that not all people are drawn to art as a practice or as a career choice yet I believe in the strength of art. That is I believe in creativity including music, drama, dance and visual art etc. Therefore I believe that Art Psychotherapy could assist people to look within themselves. Art, I have heard said before is an exterior map of the interior self.

The work I have chosen to do explores my symbolic reference to the children I have worked with as an art therapist in training. It explores the fragility of these children. It is a layered installation which refers to the many layers I have found in this work. It looks at the possible abuse of children and the lack of childhood that some may experience as a result of this. It also refers slightly to the contradiction I see in the sexualization of children. By this I do not mean that I condemn a perpetrator, I tread lightly on this issue with the choice of material that I use in the work.

The choice of material in the work is used to convey a sense of lightness and fragility. An egg is the subject matter I have chosen for the larger work. This egg is layered and entirely imperfect, the white fabric seeks out the ephemeral quality of an egg. Obviously, yet I hope not too obviously eggs are very easily broken. It is my understanding that children like shells can be easily damaged if not treated with respect. That is not to say that children are without strength that is why the work is combined with wire perhaps. The possible sexualization of the child is questioned in the lingerie like fabric I have chosen to use in the garment I have made. The tiny garment surely could not be made of this fabric or transparent paper in a 'good wholesome home'. It is a snap shot look at what may happen and does behind closed doors.

This work looks at the emotions I have explored with my clients emptied somehow into an installation work in progress titled, 'Surely I am in the wrong place?'

It is also a kind of review of the two years I have spent in the Master of Art Therapy course at Edith Cowan University. The change in me and my understanding of others due to my experience of the course. It has been a process that I intend to continue so that I may even just for a moment assist some children I will work with. I will not attempt to save them yet I may give them a moment to experience themselves differently. Holly Edworthy

Reference

Moustakas, Clark (1974)
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