

Creative-Expressive Methods Used for Challenging Purposes within the Psychological Assessment of Children and Teenagers

Elena Otilia Vladislav^{*i}

***Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Psychology Department,
University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania**

Abstract

Having a weaker ability of awareness and/or of verbal expression of the feelings one experiences, the child often finds it difficult to express his opinion about the problems which lead his family to turn to a psychologist. However, he does offer extremely valuable information through expressive-creative means.

This article will describe, through case-studies, the manner in which several expressive-creative means can be used, as challenging resources for the psychological assessment of children and teenagers.

Keywords: psycho-diagnosis, expressive-creative methods, children, teenagers

ⁱ Corresponding author: Elena Otilia Vladislav, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, Panduri 90, Sector 5, Bucharest, 050663, Romania. E-mail: elena.vladislav@fpse.unibuc.ro

I. Introduction

Having a weaker ability of awareness and/or of verbal expression of the feelings experienced, the child often finds it difficult to express his opinion about the problems which lead his family to turn to a psychologist. However, he does offer extremely valuable information through expressive-creative means. Dramatization, the play with dolls and puppets, imagery and fantasy, drawing, painting, collage, clay work, story-telling have been used across centuries by people of all cultures in order to express themselves and communicate. „We can say that we are giving back to children manners of expression which belong to them by cultural heredity” (Oaklander, V., 1988).

Being both funny and entertaining, these expressive manners have a twofold aim:

a) first of all, they give children the opportunity to experiment themselves

b) secondly, due to their projective characteristics, children can express both surface feelings and hidden ones.

As they represent an indirect means of communication, expressive-creative methods - „mediators of therapeutic dialogue” (B. Chouvier) – are less threatening for the child. What he expresses through drawing, moulding, storytelling and drama, can show his own fantasies, anxieties, fears, frustrations, attitudes, patterns of behaviour and thought, impulses, resentments, wishes, needs, and feelings. It is very often that projection remains the only way through which the child speaks about himself.

Expressive-creative methods are vehicles which bring the unconscious contents to the level of awareness, through the use of symbols. This symbolic language is to be deciphered by the therapist. This is why it is of utmost importance how he manipulates this material. Explanation and interpretation are considered ungrounded if they are not directly perceived and felt by the child.

„The experientialist therapist does not interpret to the child the material he offered through projection, although he does translate for himself what he hears and sees, in order to guide his interaction with the child. Thus, the therapist must develop a good relationship between the Actor Self and Spectator Self. In other words, he is, on the one hand, actively involved in the dialogue and play with the child, being a stimulating presence, and, on the other hand, he observes and directs, whenever necessary, the process of diagnosis or therapy” (Vladislav, E., p. 173, 2003).

The child’s ability to be aware of himself and his existence in the world grows by associating expressive techniques and the child’s real life

situations, or, in other words, by counterbalancing elements of play, fantasy and drawings with constrictions of reality.

In the Experiential Unification Therapy (P.E.U.), experience is the key to becoming aware, especially in working with children. Challenging exercises focus children on a certain experience, where they can become aware of what they are doing and how they are doing it, in order to perpetuate and maintain a certain maladaptive behaviour and thus they can take responsibility for roles and actions that are more adequate to the situation.

Prof. Iolanda Mitrofan considers that challenging and experimentation represent the first stage of the therapeutic process within P.E.U. In her conception, „this initial sequence consists of starting the exercise or the situational challenging pretext, which can be metaphoric-symbolic, bodily, or verbal, with or without creative-artistic support, improvised or relatively structured, involving the participants in a „here and now” experience of focusing, self-observation, feeling and self-revelation/self-discovery.

The effect is that of expanded self-awareness. This is expressed through revealing insights, through getting in contact with one’s profound Self, with the shadow parts of the Ego (which were repressed, denied, displaced, projected, distorted, rejected, unaccepted). One becomes aware of the state of inner incongruence and division within the psychological level, within the verbal and non-verbal expression, the social-behavioural mask and the reality of needs, feelings, perceptions and thoughts. By practising self-observance during the present situation or the challenging scenario, one gains the state of WITNESS through experience, at the same time with living the experience, which spontaneously allows one to gain access to the Unconscious and updating the most significant information together with blocked emotions and feelings – which are all the more energetic resources and creative potentials” (2000, p. 288).

What is specific to the holistic approach proposed by I. Mitrofan in the Unification Therapy, is the simultaneity of the diagnostic and therapeutic process, through active and self-aware participation of clients, though „pretexts”, explorative exercises and challenging projective situations, based on the expressive power of alternative, symbolic, creative language (Mitrofan, I., 2004).

II. Methods

I will describe in the following lines several expressive-creative methods that can be used as challenging methods in the phase of psychological assessment of children and teenagers. For a better

understanding of the working procedure, I will present some situations met in my therapeutic practice.

Case studies

Using the draw-your-problem method

Instead of talking about his problem, the child/teenager is asked to represent it in drawing. Then, he creates a story or enacts it, starting from the drawing. Thus, the child/teenager detaches from the problem, externalizes it and is able to find a new perspective, a new meaning, and new solutions to it.

I will now exemplify how I used challenge and experimentation for a diagnostic purpose in the case of Corina, a 10-year-old girl. She arrived bearing the label of a psychiatric diagnosis of „school phobia”, which I understood had a great influence on the negative manner in which both child and parents perceived her state.

During the first meeting, I found out that the little girl was the youngest in her family and that she was quite spoiled and over-protected by both her parents. She was introduced into kindergarten community at an early age, and her adjustment was good in school. She took piano and canto lesson in parallel. Problems started towards the end of her second grade, when Corina’s fear to go to school appeared. She motivated that her English teacher was treating her badly, which seemed plausible since other classmates were complaining of the same thing. She initially went to school for a few hours and then she would phone her mother to come get her, up to the point where she refused to leave home for school.

In order to understand the present context, it is important to know what had happened before she grew this fear. During the spring holiday, her parents left on a trip to Egypt, taking her brother, who was 7 years older than her. Corina had apparently accepted that it was a difficult trip for her, but she had no idea that her brother would go with his parents as well. When they returned and she realized that he was on the trip, she reproached her parents that they left her alone for two weeks. It was her first time to be separated from her parents for such a long time, and the consequence was the intense overdoing of her experience. In the lack of her parents, Corina felt rejected: she not only complained about the canto teacher for behaving badly, but also about the aunt whom she had stayed with, who presumably scolded her and protected the younger cousin. After this episode, she gradually started to reject going to school.

In the 3rd grade, she was moved to another school in order to get over her fear of the English teacher. At first, everything seemed to go well. However, a week after returning from the trip with her parents in the winter holiday, she started once more to

say she was afraid of going to school, under the pretext that she was behind her other classmates. Not knowing how to help her, the parents turned to a psychiatric hospital. Corina was hospitalized and she received the diagnosis of „school phobia”. Neither medication, nor alternative treatments – acupuncture and reflex-therapy, helped her too much.

After missing six months from school, towards the end of the school year, she returned to her old class, where she attended for the last two weeks with good results. Although she promised her parents that she would not make any problems in the fourth grade, at the end of the summer holiday she announced them adamantly that she would not go to school any longer. Corina started to develop behaviours of anxiety, opposition and a challenging behaviour in relation to her parents. She even told them she would run away from home if they obliged her to go to school again. She started to accuse them that they were mean and that they did not love her, whenever they did not please her. She seemed to have engaged in a power struggle with her parents, taking on a manipulative behaviour.

At this point, the parents turned to a psychotherapist, feeling powerless and wanting to understand what was happening with their child. When they were talking about their problems, the parents were desperate. They seemed tired of the child’s games and had started to resort to threats such as „I will not buy you... I will not take you to... if you do not go to school”. Corina seemed unimpressed and did not take them seriously.

First step of assessment

As I wanted to discover what was behind the „school phobia”, I used experiential psycho-diagnosis. I started by asking Corina to draw her fear, in order to help me know her better. She drew an ugly, deformed character, and a little girl she called Sour Cherry (I later found out this was her pet name in her family). I asked her how Fear behaved towards Sour Cherry. She told me it offended her by calling her names such as: „*Stupid, sucker, ugly.*” She started talking about how Fear took over Sour Cherry, tied her up in chains and how she could do nothing because of her. She also represented this in her drawing.

In order to activate her feelings and thoughts about Fear, I proposed an exercise of dramatization to Corina, as this expressive method implied a wider self experimentation than drawing and story-telling. Beyond the imaginary symbolic level, the child is thus helped to get in contact with her emotions and behavioural possibilities.

Together, we enacted the story she told me. I played the role of Fear and she played Sour Cherry. I

sat behind her, immobilizing her with my hands and repeating the lines told by Fear in her story. I challenged her to express her feelings and react. Being visibly disturbed by what she heard, Corina fought and managed to escape my grasp. She seemed to be happy at first, and then said it was only a game. „*I have school phobia and nobody had it before me. There is no cure for this,*” she added, apparently resigned.

Noting she was resistant to continue the game, I suggested another topic of discussion: how she saw her future. I found out that she wanted to become an actress, but she could not make it, without school. Corina’s non-verbal behaviour expressed dissatisfaction as she was talking about the possibility of not achieving her dream, and this made me tell her that there seemed to be two tendencies within her: one the one hand, she wanted to get rid of Fear and go to school, and on the other hand, she did not want to, although this stand made her unhappy. She looked at me surprised and told me it was true, she felt indeed like that. In order to better clarify each of these conflicting stances, I suggested a new dramatization by using the empty chair technique. I placed two chairs one in front of the other and I challenged her to imagine that on one of them sat „Corina who wanted to go to school” and on the other, „Corina who did not want to go to school”. She then had to sit on one chair and then on the other, in order to introduce them and start a dialogue between them, each character trying to defend her own stand.

After several exchanges of lines between the two characters, it was revealed that Corina did not want to go to school because there she had to observe certain rules and she just wanted to do whatever she liked. The fear that she would not be able to succeed in school also appeared, as she did not succeed with the piano or the singing. She is also a little too idle to learn. Her motivation for her future dreams is overwhelmed by these arguments for refusing to go to school.

Another important aspect of which she became aware was that she did not like herself. She was not sure that she could be able to achieve what she aimed for. The idea that she was handicapped also came through, as it was something her classmates said when she had missed six months of school and had been hospitalized.

In order to help her integrate the experience of the dialogue between the two characters, I asked her to sit in the Witness role. She took an equidistant position to the two chairs, and imagined she witnessed the dialogue. I invited her to tell me her opinion. I noticed her sliding into opposition again. All she wanted to say was: „*But I do not want to go to school anymore. No one will change my opinion.*”

Interpretative comments

It seemed that the diagnosis she received and the lack of treatment efficiency gave Corina the sensation that she was more special than the others, gaining more attention and even affection from her company. On the other hand, she was troubled by the fact that she could be sick, and thus, powerless. Her drawings and games during the first meeting led me to the hypothesis that it was not only about the fear of a certain demanding teacher or of failure. Her stubborn clinging to her refusal to go to school seemed more important than her lack of confidence. I asked myself what message she wanted to send to her parents, through this refusal.

Second step of assessment

The next meeting, although sorry for her parents’ suffering because of her problem, Corina declared once more that she did not want to go to school any longer.

In order to further understand the reasons behind her decision, I challenged her through an exercise of externalization by drawing. I told her to draw the Character that tells her not to go to school and name it. She drew two trees out of which a sour cherry was falling. She was named Mrs Sour No and tells the girl: „*You are no longer Corina.*” I asked her what she meant by that. She replied: „*I was brave, beautiful, smart. Now Sour - No is stronger.*”

Interpretative comments

There is certain dissatisfaction about her own person and a feeling that her identity is abolished. The sour cherry, both fruit and pet name, falls from the two trees, which can represent her two parents symbolically. In order to get to know Mrs Sour No better, I asked her to draw me a portrait of her. Thus drawing number three emerged, where Corina represented the soul of Sour No, which was big and mean and angry with a lot of people.

The feeling of guilt for upsetting her parents emerges. I dared her to think about what would happen in a year, in order to identify her expectations and the manner in which she projected herself in the future. In drawing number 4, she suggestively explained how Mrs Sour-No got into Corina’s head, spread there and got to abolish her as a person. The character Corina said with tears in her eyes: „*I am Sour-No. I am mean, very mean.*”

I asked her who could help Corina in order to avoid getting into this situation, and point out her resources. Corina answered by repeating something she heard her father say: „*There is no help. Only her willpower can save her.*” Drawing number 5 represented this. She drew a character in blue, that

seemed to be floating and said: „I am Mrs. Will and your guardian Angel.”

The last drawing in her series (drawing 6) showed the end of the story which she entitled spontaneously: „The story of Sour Cherry No and of Will”. The drawing is dominated by her image. There is a lot of yellow in this drawing, suggesting cheerfulness and hope. I noticed that on her blouse and pants stood written *Egypt* and on the sides – „I am fine”, „I was in Egypt”. Mrs. Will watches her from the sky telling her „Very well”.

At this point, it became clear what her desire was: to go to Egypt and heal the wound left by the experience of her parent’s trip, which she felt as abandonment and rejection.

Over the series of drawings and stories, I could notice a certain instability in Corina: there were times when she wanted to give up her negativism, and times when she opposed change.

The **hypotheses** I formed on the basis of the experiential psycho-diagnosis were as follows:

1. Corina felt abandoned, rejected when her parents lied to her that they would not take any child with them in their trip, but took her brother. Her fears about school allowed her to regress and receive more care and attention from her parents.

Moreover, it is possible that she thought her parents loved her less than her brother, and feeling rejected by them, she thought she was mean.

2. Corina was experiencing a painful inner conflict between the tendency to refuse going to school, which gave her a series of emotional advantages, and her wish to go to school, being aware that only so she could make her dreams about the future come true. Her inability to solve this conflict by herself gave her a feeling of lack of confidence and powerlessness. She devalued herself, with a painful feeling of losing her identity.

3. Due to their fears, the parents maintained Corina’s feeling of lack of power. Although they thought that they were helping her by having an over-protective attitude towards her, they only reinforced the blockage she was in.

In conclusion, the experiential psycho-diagnosis helped me shed light on this case and build a strategy for the therapeutic intervention, which was successful. Corina started the fourth grade on time and was supported in overcoming her fears, having less absences and most of all, enjoying the pleasant experiences in school. The loving, supportive, yet firm attitude of the parents was very important.

During one of the last meetings she told me she liked the fact that „My parents did not let me

decide not to go to school, they cared about me, they thought about my future”.

Metaphorical drawing: Solving a personal problem (adapted, after J. Mills and R. Crowley, 1986)

The aim of this challenging exercise is that the person focuses on a problem, a life difficulty one wants to solve, then establishes a clear objective and the path to it. The steps for solving it depend on the obstacles met in the way and on finding the resources one can use to remove the obstacles. Through this procedure, children/teenagers can take responsibility for solving the problems they face and discover that they do possess resources and adaptive strategies.

Instruction: „Please think of a problem you are facing right now, something bothering you and that you would like to get over and solve. In the bottom left corner of the page in front of you, draw your problem. It can take any shape. It can be more concrete or abstract. It is important that you find it representative for your problem...Now think about how the key to the problem, the solution, would look like. Draw this solution in the top right part of the page... Now look at your paper and imagine how the path from the problem to the solution looks like. Is it straight, is it winding? I invite you to draw it on your paper. Good... Things are starting to take shape, like in a story. We started from the problem and, if there is a problem, that means there are some obstacles blocking its solution. Think about what these obstacles can be and draw them on the path... when you have finished, think of what you need to in order to get over each obstacle and draw the help you need near each obstacle... now look at your paper and notice the story unfolding before your eyes. Would you like to tell the story in the drawing?”

I will present in the lines below some dialogue sequences I had with Andreea, a 13 year-old girl who was brought to counselling because of some behaviour problems. She was included in a group of teenagers.

Andreea: „My problem is my fights with my mother. We argue out of anything. Last night I called and she told me not to stop over at Teo’s place during the weekdays, as I used to go to him from school. I haven’t been home too much in the last three weeks... So last night I called to tell her I was going to be late a little because I wanted to go to his place, and she said I am having it my way again, and so last night I had to stay up late to learn. I learned and that was that.

Therapist: „So the problem is the fights you have with your mother.”

Andreea: „Yes, everything starts from her and I get into fights with father for nothing as well.”

Therapist: „And the fights start from the fact that she does not let you take your own decisions.”

Andreea: „Yes. She will not decide for me all my life. My father says why don't I tell them before I go somewhere and ask for their permission. I already stopped asking for money from them, not to depend on them any longer.”

Therapist: „But what is the solution? I see you drew a little star.”

Andreea: „Patience. I don't know. I don't like it either when mother shouts at me and raises her voice. She doesn't necessarily shout, it seems like that to me. I do not have patience with her. I start as well. We shout at one another. In the end she has to leave the rooms or I let her speak and turn on the music.”

Therapist: „The solution would be...”

Andreea: „To have more patience. To try to think... We usually shout at one another. I close the door and she shouts from the other side. I turn on the music and don't hear her any longer. She can speak all day long.”

Therapist: „It is about your impulsivity.”

Andreea: „Yes.”

Therapist: „Have you tried sometimes to think before you say what you have to say?”

Andreea: „No, I haven't. I usually talk first and then it is too late for that.”

Therapist: „But I understand that you wanted to do that. How would that help you?”

Andreea: „Maybe we wouldn't fight like that.”

Therapist: „What are the obstacles you meet on the path to solving your problem?”

Andreea: „The obstacles are my mother and I, because neither of us lets it be and we do not try to understand one another... My mother lets it be for some time, and then she says why she should be the only one doing that. I will try to be more open towards her.”

Andreea: „Patience could be my help. Patience for both of us. And trying to understand certain things.”

Therapist: „What other obstacles are there?”

Andreea: „My behaviour. I get angry very quickly and shout.”

Therapist: „Is there any other obstacle?”

Andreea: „Ambition. I never let anything slide because I don't like being inferior to her.”

Therapist: „What about the help?”

Andreea: „My only help is patience. My patience above all.”

She takes responsibility for solving the conflicts at home.

Therapist: „I suggest you imagine for several minutes that you are your mother. Remember the last fight you had and try to see everything through her eyes.”

I thus suggest her to place herself in her imagination, in the role of her mother, to empathize with her.

„What did you find out about your mother?”

Andreea: „Despite having frequent fights with her, I think she is the only one at home offering me more freedom and she sometimes understands me better than father does, because he is a man and he can't understand certain things. I think she wants to get along better with me, but sometimes she does not understand that it is through her attitude that she pushes me away from her. I know she sometimes tries so hard to do this, but I, being a rebel, like doing everything by myself... To a certain degree, I am also responsible for the fights between us...”

Therapist: „What concrete action could you take in order to get along better?”

Andreea: „I could tell what I do not like about her, what doesn't suit me. And she could do the same.”

Therapist: „How will your relationship be practically when you get along better? What would you do? What would she do?”

Andreea: „I would stop doing the things she doesn't like and she would stop doing the things I don't like.”

Therapist: „I wish you success in practicing what you have just understood about your relationship today. You will tell us next session how it all went.”

Andreea: „Yes. I will try to change bit by bit.”

Andreea practically aimed to make a list with her mother with the things they like and dislike about the other's behaviour and to keep that list in mind for their relationship.

Interpretative comments

The metaphorical drawing of the problem helped Andreea to identify her life situation that she wanted to change and to positively project herself into the future in order to achieve her change. She was able to become more aware of the obstacles in her solving the problem, and the resources, those which she could practically apply in order to better adjust.

The metaphorical drawing techniques, which are similar to other challenging techniques, hold both a diagnostic role, and a therapeutic one, facilitating the process of change.

The story and the fairytale

The story and the fairytale stimulate the child's „decentralization”, creating perspective games which can make him put himself in other's shoes and find something of himself in the others. The child can project his fears and difficulties in his life on the negative characters in the fairytales, and the characters helping the Hero, miraculous beings or objects, give the child the opportunity to activate his inner resources.

Sheldon Cashdan (1999) considers that fairytales offer a unique access to the children's emotional life. Their value lies in their power to help children cope with the inner conflicts they are facing in their growth process. The psychological role of fairytales is to solve conflicts between the positive and negative forces within the Self. From one fairytale to another, the Witch embodies the unhealthy aspects of the Self, with which all children struggle. In fairytales, children are faced with certain „sins of childhood” such as: vanity, envy, greed, trickery, idleness, gluttony, which they learn how to master. The author considers that fairytales are the psychodramas of childhood. „Behind these fantastical incursions into imagination, there are real life dramas, which reflect real life struggles”. When listening to a fairytale, children project unaware parts of themselves on different story characters, using them as psychological repositories for the competing elements of the Self.

Another manner to work with fairytales in psychotherapy is the one offered by Paola Santagostino (2004). She encourages her patients to make up their own fairytale. The invented fairytales follow the three fundamental stages: the beginning of the fairytale, where characters are introduced and one is presented with a situation of fragile balance; the crisis, the central phase of the fairytale, where the problem, the main character and the allies he can count on, the enemies against which the hero will fight, are presented, and the ending which illustrates a new more durable balance which brings more satisfaction than the one at the beginning. „This personal and original creation stemming from the subject's imagination, allows the therapist to note symbolical elements which describe the inner processes of the story teller, his difficulties, his conflicts, his strengths, and his latent potential, and to make them useful instruments for psychotherapy.” (2004, p.24) The author noticed in her practice that the healing process itself would begin spontaneously, as soon as the solution to the problem was found at an imaginary level. This occurs irrespective of the connections the author does between the symbolic elements of the story and the concrete elements of his real life.

In my psychotherapeutic practice with children, I noticed that the method of making a personal fairytale, combined with its enactment with puppets, can offer more information for assessment and also provides better effects in therapy. I noticed that, for younger children, it is easier to start from a concrete stimulus: a drawing or a clay work they previously created. Therefore, the method I use more often is the following: I ask the child to make a drawing or model

in clay the hero of a personal story, anything he wants, and then to invent an event in which the hero is the main character chosen by him. On a symbolic level, the stories the children make up offer valuable information about their preoccupations, the difficulties they have, the conflicts they are facing, and also the resources they possess and the solutions they can find.

We then move from the personal story or fairytale, to its dramatization. The child chooses the puppets which embody each of his characters, he goes into every role, he makes them relate, he gives life to the plot. Dramatization helps him involve completely: on an imaginary, cognitive, emotional and behavioural level. By means of externalizing his personal story, the child experiments parts of him, has the opportunity to express certain feelings and activate his resources. The story and dramatization are continued over several sessions, until he finds the solution to the initial problem. The end implies inner restructuring.

The role of the therapist is to accompany the child in this process of inner expression. The therapist can play certain roles, but only as suggested by the child. He helps the child express himself emotionally and behaviourally, make the dialogue between the characters, find allies. In the phase of inventing the story, presenting the problem and finding solution, they work only on an imaginary level, without the therapist interpreting the child's story and play. When the solution has been found on an imaginary level, making the connection between fiction and reality can be useful. Then, the child can directly approach certain problems which he is facing in reality and he can be helped transfer the solutions he found in the story to his behaviour.

Case study

Prince Charming and Prince Ugly

Victor was 8 years old and in the first grade. When he was 1 year old, he was diagnosed with spastic paraplegia and axial hypotonia and went through several surgeries. His intellect was normal, he communicated verbally with ease. He could use his hands for self-serving and writing but he could not walk, he usually moved in a wheelchair and seldom used a frame. He lived with his mother, who was actively involved in his recovery. Due to the fact that the mother wanted the child very much and the father was involved in another relationship, she took on the role of single mother since the beginning. The father visited them very rarely, and was mostly financially involved in the relation with his son. We can thus state that Victor was, from the beginning, „mother's child”. Victor was dependent on his mother for many daily activities.

In school, Victor was well integrated in the group of children. His colleagues liked him and helped him when he needed it. He generally rose up to the school's requests, except that his writing was only a little slower than the others'.

His mother requested his insertion into a psychotherapy program, because it seemed to her that, for a while now, Victor had become more indifferent, unsure and less involved in his physical recovery exercises. She wanted that the boy be helped to become more confident, and more open to knowledge. From the dialogue with her, I noticed that, in her relationship with Victor, she oscillated between overprotection and a critical attitude when she thought that he was not doing some things he could do by himself. She could not tell anymore if what she asked of him was realistic or not. Her greatest fear was that Victor would be left to no one, when she no longer lived. Her dream was that one day, Victor would rise and walk towards her.

I started the story from the Draw a Person Test. Victor first outlined a boy, but he disliked the way it turned up. He wanted to draw another one, with a well outlined body. He told me that the first was Prince Ugly and that the second was Prince Charming, as in the poem he learned at school: „I leave ugly and come back charming/I leave flying and come back walking”. He drew a motorcycle for Prince Charming, which he used for transport.

The personal fairytale: *Prince Ugly was afraid even of shadows. He would run as if he had fire at his back. Prince Charming had no fear. He would fight dragons. His mother, father and brother waited for him at home. They did not know how to fight.*

Prince Ugly would put others to fight the enemies in his place. He would sit somewhere, where no one would come to kill him, and the others would fight in his place. He was afraid of anything. Even of a brave man. He would sit in idleness. Prince Ugly just wanted to sit in idleness at the bottom of a precipice.

Prince Ugly wished that he could fight.

Prince Ugly did not like to do anything at all.

Prince Charming could help Prince Ugly and tell him „Overcome your fear.”

Prince Ugly actually did not want that. At the bottom of the precipice, there was so much dirt, he could not stand it.

Prince Ugly had fallen into the precipice. He dug a tunnel with his sword. He got tired. He only dug half of the tunnel. Prince Charming was at the top and had a bigger sword than his. Prince Ugly would get sick of digging all the tunnel. So he was lying down. At last, Prince Charming dug.

Prince Ugly: „Thank you.”

Prince Charming: „But why don't you want to fight?”

Prince Ugly: „Because I am afraid to.”

Prince Charming: „Well, you have to fight. What if I am in some other battle and the phone rings I don't hear it, will you sleep in the precipice until I get here?”

Prince Ugly: „Either I sleep there or I walk to the hut and wait for you there.”

Interpretative comments

The poem that impressed Victor was a metaphor of his present situation. He expressed opposite parts of his Ego in the two heroes, Prince Ugly and Prince Charming. Prince Ugly reflected his weak, unsure, dependent and scared part. It was that part of himself we wanted to get rid of.

Prince Charming appeared as his strong, masculine, active part, which wanted to come out victorious. What is interesting is that he referred to his stronger side from the very start of the story. Prince Charming was the ideal and accessible self image. Despite his health problems, Victor did not have an inner representation of a completely powerless child.

The precipice is symbolic for the Mother Archetype, at the same time loved and terrifying, (a frequent interpretation in C.G. Jung's analytical psychology). It is here that Prince Ugly felt comfortable, protected, but the environment had become unpleasant, there was „dirt”, he wanted to get out but he felt too weak. The sword is a sign of masculinity. The beginning of the story suggests the idea that Victor wanted to escape his dependence on his mother and gain access to his masculinity: Prince Charming had a bigger sword than Prince Ugly, who was trapped in the precipice. Yet his fears prevented him from fighting.

After telling the story, it was the turn for its dramatization. Victor chose puppets to represent Prince Charming and Prince Ugly and enacted the story. By making opposing Ego parts concrete and externalizing them, he was led to a shift in perspective. He became actor of his own personal drama. In the scene he enacted, Prince Charming helped Prince Ugly come out of the precipice and then fought a Dragon, thus giving Prince Ugly an example of bravery.

During the following meetings, I encouraged Victor to dramatize the next parts of the story, where Prince Ugly met his Fears. He was afraid of tornados, of shadows. If a good man came with a sword, he would get scared. „You fight, Prince Charming.” „Go the battle and call someone to sit with me, because I am afraid.” Prince Ugly would be scared mostly at night. „He could not run away.”

Victor showed in the play how Prince Ugly met his fears, which had been embodied by puppets. By playing the roles of his fears, he was able to control them. And by playing the role of Prince Charming, his aid, he became more confident in his ability to face obstacles.

During another game, where Prince Ugly was fighting his Fears, he chose for ally another puppet which he named Păcală, a character who seemed fool to the others but always came out of situations by playing tricks on people, and laughing of their faults. Păcală represents his cognitive resource, cleverness.

In one of the games, it was revealed that his greatest fear was the Evil Witch. He enacted the confrontation between Prince Ugly, who had become stronger then, and the Evil Witch, with the help of puppets. The Good Fairy appeared as ally, granting him three wishes: to be brave, to have strong weapon, and to grow a longer hand in order to grab those who scare him by the neck. In the end, the Evil Witch was killed.

Comments

In order to integrate his masculinity, he needed to confront the negative image of the feared mother, symbolically illustrated by the Evil Witch, and to be supported by the Good Fairy, which was a symbolic, idealized expression of the good mother. If the Evil Witch deprived the Hero of his powers and annihilated and paralyzed him, the Good Fairy offered him active powers: force, courage, having a positive action over the Hero's masculinity.

Puppet psychodrama

In order to show the manner in which I use puppet psychodrama for externalizing the symptom, I will present the case of Oana, a 7-year old girl in the first grade.

Oana had a 2-year and a half old brother. She was very jealous of him and even refused to stay at home with her parents when mother brought him from maternity, preferring to live with her paternal grandmother for a while. When Oana's mother was pregnant with the little boy, there were some family discussions, after which she decided to leave with the girl to her parents in another town. They spent several weeks away from her father and Oana's grandmother, who had raised her and to which she was very attached. The little girl remembered that they were gone for a longer period of time than in reality and wondered why her mother took her as well. She said she missed her father and her grandmother during that period and wanted to return home.

She entered the community at three and a half years old. Her first year of kindergarten was bad for her. She had the mischance to have a teacher who

would shout at children. She got scared and refused to go there any longer. The following year, she changed her class and she apparently adjusted well to it, she would attend with pleasure and make friends. However, she started to vomit daily, a thing which she did during all kindergarten period. It was useful to know that she did not vomit during holidays and at weekends. Ever since she started school, Oana took back the habit of vomiting every morning. She said she liked her teacher and that she was satisfied with sharing the same class with several class mates from kindergarten. The little girl also had a strong separation anxiety. She did not want to go anywhere without her parents, not even to her maternal grandparents. If left alone, she would panic and „mourn” until her parents come for her.

Apart from these problems that got the parents worried, Oana is an intelligent, communicative, joyful and playful little girl. The reason the parents asked for psychological consultation is the problem of the vomit impulse.

From our very first session I proposed Oana to use puppets as means of expression. As she related morning vomiting to fear of school, I asked her to pick a puppet for her Fear and one for herself. Then we dramatized her confrontation with Fear (conversation between the puppet representing herself and the puppet representing Fear). Thus I was able to find out more things about what Fear said to her before making her „vomit”. It was about several worries about school: that she did not make her schoolbag well, that the dentist could come and pour solution on her teeth that could make them turn blue and children would laugh of her, that she would be vaccinated. She had an increased fear of being wrong when asked in class, and thus she would not raise her hand unless she was extremely sure that she had the right answer. As it was obvious that she did not like obeying to the character Fear, I suggested that she call some Help. She picked a puppet she called Mrs. Courage. We then dramatized how Fear came to her and how Mrs. Courage protected her and sent Fear away.

Interpretative comments

These types of dramatizations were the most preferred games Oana had during the first sessions. It was a method to externalize her fears and activate her resources for coping with uneasy situations. She liked her alliance with Mrs. Courage so much that she gave up the symptom for a week, and after that it came back less frequently, whenever Mrs. Courage was sick or out of town, as she put it.

Since the third meeting, she suggested that we enact with the puppets the moments when several fears occurred: Fear of school, Fear of morning, when she

vomited, and Fear of Evening, when unknown guests came to her and she would be ashamed.

In the first scene, Fear of school told Oana that she would not know the answers during the classes, that she would put on her „winy” face and classmates will laugh at her. Mrs. Courage drove her away and Oana received a „happy face” in her play, as reward for giving the right answers.

In the second scene, Fear of morning talked about all reasons to worry and made her vomit. This time as well, Mrs. Courage drove her away. Another character was introduced, Granny, for which she spontaneously picked out a puppet. She was Mrs/Courage’s help.

In the third scene, Fear of evening told her that guests would laugh of her, or say she was ugly, that she could not dance. Mrs. Courage praised her, telling her she danced well. This time, her allies were Mother and Granny.

I could notice that Oana had great dramatization resources. She was creative and spontaneous in her play. The main problem seemed to be her fear of rejection, needing feminine figures to secure her.

I suggested, during the same session, that she should dramatize her Fear to stay with her grandparents (her maternal ones). She assured me that Mrs. Courage would not intervene here. She initially enacted the scene where her parents leave and she cried for them, and called them to come get her. In the second parts, she showed me how she ignored Fear and how she got dressed and went with Grandma to Children’s Town. Still, she wanted to come back quickly to her parents. She showed how they came to get her after a week and how they all returned together to Bucharest. In the play, she mentioned she did have pleasant moments with her grandparents and her parents praised her for being courageous.

Interpretative comments

During this meeting, Oana enacted fearful scenes of her life, using puppets. She could thus directly express her emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and needs. Every time, I suggested her to enact her desired scene, in order for the idea of change to grow roots within her, and to make her feel like she had the resources to overcome her fears. The strongest fear is that of separating from her parents. I could notice this on my own, in the office. There were two times when she did not find her mother in the waiting room and panicked. She instantly felt nausea. Then she made a habit out of making her promise not to leave anywhere as long as she was with me in the office, and would use different excuses to get out and check whether she was there or not.

Using collage of magazine images

One of the particularities of working with magazine collages as expressive-creative support is creating a work of art using exterior images already created by others (Rogélet, A., 2001). In the case study presented below, it was through collage that I approached the polarity „Personal Perception of self and The Other’s Perception of self”, with the aim of emphasizing potential incongruities and help the 14 year old teenager accept these aspects of self image.

Instructions: „Please find a comfortable position to sit in and look inside you for several moments. What comes to your mind when you think of the things that characterize you?... What are the images you associate them with?... There is no need to tell them out loud. I invite you now to think about how others around you see you: your colleagues, your friends, your family. What characteristics do they think you have?... What images do you associate with those characteristics?...When you think you have formed some clear ideas about these aspects, you may go the work platform. You will find there several magazines, papers of different sizes, scissors, glue. With the images from the magazines, you will create a collage named: «How I see myself now» and another one «How do the others see me». Quietly go through the magazines and when you find images that fit the ones in your mind, you may cut them out or tear them. Then you can glue them to a paper of your choice. At the end of the meeting, we will all take some time for everyone to present their collage. Work quietly, in order to pay attention to what the images transmit, to what feelings they stir... If you do find the images you have in mind, then you can draw or write in order to complete the collage... Now that you are done, I invite you to talk about your collages.” (Vladislav Elena, 2009)

Bogdan, showing his first collage: „I see myself as a sulky person, thinking all the time about his misfortunes, his troubles.”

Therapist: „He is only thinking about his problems, about how upset and sad he is.”

Bogdan: „Here is another one holding his head in his hands in sadness and another one, hiding in darkness.”

Therapist: „Hiding?”

Bogdan: „Well, in himself. He doesn’t talk much, no one would notice him anyway. This is another reason for his sadness. He is upset because his situation is not the same as the others’.... First of all, I feel badly not because I have troubles, not because this is how I understand my fate should be, but because I see other people living a better life. I resent not for not being like them. I haven’t murdered anyone. I am an honest person.”

Therapist: „You are also entitled to be happy.”

Bogdan: „Right. I am also entitled to be like the others. Or at least a bit inferior to them, but not in the bad plight I am now.”

Therapist: „Now you are getting angrier.”

Bogdan: „Yes, I am.” (He raises his voice.)

Therapist: „What bad plight are you in, Bogdan?”

Bogdan: „I am not doing well. I am scared.”

Therapist: „Of...”

Bogdan: „Something bad happening.”

Bogdan (showing us the other collage): „The others see me as if I had no problem, or at least my parents do so.”

Therapist: „How do your parents see you?”

Bogdan: „They see that I look good, that I am happy. That I have no problem, no reason for being upset. They aren't aware of my problems.”

Therapist: „Bogdan, as I am looking at the photo of the sad man and see him bent over, it is as if he has become one with his problem, and he sees nothing else around him.”

Bogdan: „Indeed. It's like that.”

Therapist: „Can you see other things that make you happy if you only stare at the problem?”

Bogdan: „No, not really.”

Therapist (highlighting the idea of externalizing the problem): „How do you see your problem from the distance? Look at it. It is shown on the paper in front of your eyes. You are no longer one with the problem. How do you see it?”

Bogdan: „So. Awkward. Upsetting. It bothers me.”

Therapist: „How does this problem convince you to become one with it?”

Bogdan: „I remember it all the time.”

Therapist: „Doesn't it leave you alone?”

Bogdan: „No, it doesn't.”

Therapist: „What does it say to you?”

Bogdan: „Look. They are all feeling great, except you.”

Therapist: „You feel you have become one with the problem and see no way out of it, How do you perceive it if you try to distance yourself from it?”

Bogdan says nothing.

Therapist: „Don't you feel that, when you think so much about your problem, it becomes even greater?”

Bogdan: „O become more nervous.”

Therapist: „Your problem is shown in the collage in front of you. What is your choice: to identify once more with it or see it from the distance?”

Bogdan: „To see it from the distance.”

Therapist: „How do you perceive it now?”

Bogdan: „I see it differently. It does not torture me any longer. It does not have any more power. It is locked on that paper.”

Therapist: „Who doesn't give it power anymore?”

Bogdan, taking responsibility on himself: „I don't.”

Therapist: „What do the persons closer to you say about the things you should be grateful for?”

Bogdan: „They say that I am smart, but that I am too lazy to think. But that is not true. I am not too lazy to think. I am too preoccupied about my problem. I think about it too much and have little time left to think about other things.”

Therapist: „So that's it. You let it take over you. You allow it to do that. It is just an idea creeping in your mind slowly. But it is you who gives it too much importance. Were you aware of that?”

Bogdan: „Not quite.”

Therapist: „What could you do to stop it from overwhelming you?”

Bogdan: „I could solve it.”

Therapist: „What could you focus your attention on?”

Bogdan: „I could focus it on what makes me feel better. On computers.”

Therapist: „I suggest a game. Let's imagine you are in front of a computer. Your problem appears to you as an image on the screen and you can use the keyboard to make it smaller and smaller, blurrier, less clear.”

Bogdan, smiling: „I put it into Recycle bin and gave it a partner. A cell mate.”

Therapist: „How did you feel like, in front of the keyboard?”

Bogdan: „I felt good. I felt in charge of it.”

Therapist: „So it was not in charge of you anymore.”

Bogdan: „No, it wasn't.”

Therapist: „Well, how do you feel now?”

Bogdan: „Better.”

Therapist: „Is the collage still representative of you now?”

Bogdan: „It's far from me now.”

Therapist: „Would you like to find some images to make a collage of other things that represent you now?”

Bogdan, decisively: „Yes, I would.”

Interpretative comments

Externalizing the problem helped Bogdan move focus from his anger and get out of the victim role he often played. He became more responsible, taking responsibility for finding solutions, on an

imaginary level at first (his main resource), which he could then apply to reality. By detaching himself, he was able to see other aspects that granted him satisfaction.

Bogdan made a new collage representing how he felt at that moment..

Bogdan: „This is my virus collection. I keep them hidden.”

Therapist: „Don't you use them anymore?”

Bogdan: „I don't need them for the time being.”

It is worth mentioning that at the beginning of the group sessions, Bogdan would obsessively speak about the viruses he created on the computer and that he would send to the colleagues who upset him, in order to destroy their computers. He was obsessed with the idea of taking revenge on the ones who had offended and rejected him.

Bogdan: „This here is INTEL, the greatest computer firm in the world. I would like to work here. This here is a program. I would like to be a programmer. I am good with computers. These are men of science. I am interested in science, in medicine. I like to know everything about new discoveries.”

Therapist: „I notice that you are speaking louder now than during your first presentation.”

Bogdan: „Yes, I am.”

Therapist: „And that your body was bent before, leaning forward.”

Bogdan: „After I downsized my anger, I straightened my back, I felt better.”

Therapist: „Did you see your passions? Your tone of voice is also different. You made this happen. You focused on your passions.”

Bogdan: „I want to do these things.”

Therapist: „What do the other collage images stand for?”

Bogdan: „I would like to be famous, like Bush – to know secrets, to lead. To be a businessman.”

Therapist: „To have power.”

Bogdan: „Indeed. And I would also like to have a girlfriend to talk to, to get along with and I would like to work in the computer field.”

Therapist: „Do you feel like you can accomplish all these things?”

Bogdan: „Yes.”

Therapist: „When do you want to accomplish them?”

Bogdan: „In time.”

Therapist: „What is it that depends on you in order to accomplish these things?”

Bogdan: „It depends on me to have high standards and to do anything possible, anything in my power for it.”

Therapist: „I wish you success!”

Interpretative comments

Bogdan no longer identifies himself with his anger and he activated other aspects of his Self concept: his aspirations, his desired roles, his interests. This fortified his Ego, which could be noticed the most in changes at a non-verbal level.

An exercise of symbolic expression based on artistic support – plasticine modelling.

I will further present the manner in which I used the plasticine modelling technique while working with opposing parts of the Ego. The aim was not only that of diagnosis and clarification, but also that of therapy: re-signification, self-transformation and integration of Shadow elements of the Ego.

The conversation example is taken out of a group therapy session with teenagers. The protagonist is Cristi, a 12-year old boy with discipline and school adjustment difficulties.

Instruction: „I ask everybody to think about one thing you like about yourself, and one thing you don't. Pick a piece of plasticine for each of these two parts. Notice if there is some inspiration coming from the shape and colour of the plasticine. Now that you have made your choices, model every piece of plasticine until it gets the shape of that part of yourself that you are thinking about. In the end, place them on a piece of paper in front of you, in that relation one to another, that you feel they are in at the present moment, inside of you... Now look at them and notice what your construction in front of you suggests. How do you see the two parts from the outside? How do you see the relation between them?... Who would like to talk about what they modelled?” (Vladislav, E., 2009).

Therapist: „Let's move on to your parts, Cristi.”

Cristi: „A Fool and Myself. I play Fool at school.”

Radu: „They would call me the class jester when I was in the third grade.”

Therapist: „I understand that you it is the Fool part that you don't like about yourself. What is its purpose?”

Cristi: „Well, I don't know. I want to look big and strong and I miss it.”

Therapist: „You don't seem to succeed in being big and strong.”

Cristi: „Right.”

Therapist: „So you need others to think you are big and strong and that is why you play fool.”

Cristi: „Sometimes, I do it unaware.”

Therapist: „It is out of your control.”

Cristi: „Yes.”

Therapist: „Radu, did you want the same things?”

Radu: „I don't know. I was little.”

Tudor: „When you are little you can't help playing the fool. I used to do that too. Every boy does that.”

Therapist: „Go on, Cristi.”

Cristi: „I feel stupid afterwards. I realized I am stupid.”

Therapist: „You get angry with yourself.”

Cristi: „There are two persons in me: A Fool and Cristi.”

Therapist: „Cristi the Serious.”

Cristi: „Yes.”

The therapist suggests a dramatization exercise: „Let's imagine that these two parts, Cristi the Fool and Cristi the Serious, have a little conversation. What are they saying to one another?”

Cristi, pointing to the pieces modelled in plasticine: „He tells to the other one that he is stupid, and the other one tells him that he is stupid as well.”

Therapist: „They offend one another. There is a fight. A kind of battle.”

Cristi: „Yes.”

Therapist: „Do you feel this battle inside of you often?”

Cristi: „Yes.”

Therapist: „Let's get it out. Would you like to use two colleagues to embody the two parts of yourself?”

Cristi: „Yes.” He chooses Radu as Fool and Tudor as Cristi the Serious.

„I just got a headache.”

Cristi somatises this inner conflict.

Therapist: „Place Tudor and Radu in the centre of the group. They will embody the two parts of yourself, that now have a chance to speak. You will enter one role at a time. As for you two, please remember the lines he gives in the role you are playing. Now, if everybody is clear on what he has to do, let's play.

During the role-play:

Cristi the Fool: „I act like this just to stand out, to look big and strong. And I also make bad jokes on my colleagues.”

Cristi the Serious: „That's not good. You have to show your good side to your colleagues, if you want to have friends.”

Therapist: „Your good side...”

Cristi the Serious: „To be kind, to know how to behave. You can stand out in some other ways.”

Cristi the Fool: „You are right, I will try not to be a fool any longer. I don't like it too much either.”

Therapist: „How are you feeling?”

Cristi the Fool: „Mocked by girls. Boys are all the same. Girls say that I am stupid.”

Therapist: „What do you think?”

Cristi the Fool: „I make jokes with them so that they won't say I am stupid anymore.”

Tudor: „Let me tell you one thing. The greatest mistake in front of a girl is to play fool. I was reproached that whenever I acted like a fool, I would ruin every image of seriousness I created before.”

Cristi the Fool: „I agree with what he said. I need to be a good colleague and have friends and that is why I pretend to be a Fool. To earn their friendship.”

Cristi the Serious: „Don't mind the colleagues. They don't deserve anything. They are all arrogant.”

The therapist emphasized the need expressed earlier: „Yet Cristi needs to have friends.”

Cristi the Serious: „But they don't want to.”

Therapist: „Please step out of the scene. Now you are Cristi who contains them both and you witnessed their conversation.”

Cristi was in a witness role, while Radu and Tudor re-enacted the scene before.

Therapist: „What do you think?”

Cristi: „I saw myself.”

Therapist: „How?”

Cristi: „I realized that it is not ok to be either like this, or like that.”

Therapist: „But how is it ok to be like?”

Cristi: „To be just as I am, with good and bad parts.”

Therapist: „What are your good parts?”

Cristi: „I do not know.”

The therapist turns to the group: „Let's help Cristi see his good parts. You tell him what you think his qualities are, what you like about him.”

Tudor: „I like the fact that you are creative, that you can manage in different situations. It seems to me that you have a great potential and that you are hiding it and I don't know why.”

Cristina: „You are never sleepy or sad. You always feel like talking. This also makes me recover whenever I am sad.”

Radu: „I like your optimism.”

Monica: „I was surprised when you said you would play the role of the Fool, because here you were always serious, educated, well behaved. I think you are also very sensitive and, as Tudor said before, you have potential and I think you know it.”

Therapist: „He knows he has a good part, he doesn't know what it is.”

Monica: „You have time to discover it, it is important that you do have it.”

Alexandra: „I like the figures you created. You have talent.”

Therapist: „How do you feel now after listening to what your colleagues had to say?”

Cristi: „Better.”

Therapist: „Is your headache still there?”

Cristi: „No, it isn't.”

He externalized his conflict and freed himself from the tension present in his head.

Therapist: „Please mould now the good part of yourself, as you feel it, and place it next to the others. What does it represent?”

Cristi: „A gift. Something I am offering.”

Therapist: „Tonus, optimism, merriness, and many other things the others around you will certainly discover when they open it. How do you feel after this experience?”

Cristi: „I felt good. I realized I have good parts as well.”

Therapist: „How do you intent to use these aspects in relation to the others?”

Cristi: „I can be merry without being a Fool. I see the group likes it.”

Interpretative comments

Cristi found the significance of his rejected part of himself through the help of challenging exercises, and he expressed his need to relate. It was a moment of honesty of which he had to take most advantage, by becoming aware of it. He usually took the role of the person who did not need friends and exhibited a rebellious, provoking behaviour.

References

- Blom, R. (2006). *The handbook of gestalt play therapy*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Bettelheim, B. (1976). *Psychanalyse des condes de fees*. Paris: Robert Laffont Publishing House.
- Cashdan, S. (2009). *The witch must die*. Bucharest: Trei Publishing House.
- Mills, J., Crowley, R. (1986). *Therapeutic metaphors for children and the child within*. NY: Brunner/Mayer Publishers.
- Mitrofan, I. (coord.) (2000). *Experiential orientation in psychotherapy*. Bucharest: SPER Publishing House.
- Mitrofan, I. (2004). *Unification therapy. A holistic approach to human development and transformation*. Bucharest: SPER Publishing House.
- Oaklander, V. (1988). *Windows to our children: a gestalt therapy approach to children and adolescents*. Highland, NY: The Gestalt Journal Press.
- Oster, G., Gould, P. (1995). *Using drawings in assessment and therapy*. NY: Brunner/Mazer Publishers.
- Rogélet, A. (2001). *Un atelier de collage avec des enfants hyperactifs* (document roneote). Lyon: Université Lumière Lyon 2.
- Santangostino, P. (2008). *How to heal with a story*. Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House.
- Vladislav, E., (2003). Children - blockages and resources in psychotherapy. Case studies. In: Mitrofan, I. (ed. Coord.) *The obstacle race of human development. Child and family centred psychology, psycho-pathology, psycho-diagnosis and psychotherapy focused on child and family*. (203-283). Iași: Polirom Publishing House.
- Vladislav, E. (2009). *The self concept in teenagers – assessment and optimization in the experiential group therapy*. Bucharest: SPER Publishing House.