

Quality of Life improvement through dramatherapy with people with dementia: A developmental approach

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Abstract

This paper explores Quality of life (QoL) of people with dementia from a developmental viewpoint by presenting research stories from 16 sessions of dramatherapy. An early life developmental paradigm, Embodiment, Projection and Role (EPR), is reversed for old age, in order to honour later lifestages: Role, Projection and Embodiment (RPE) actively promoting expression. The full range of feeling intelligence (a concept defined and clarified in this article) was apparent in the dramatherapy group during a mixed-method project. Improved QoL of the group was demonstrated, compared with a control group undertaking 'usual activities'. Triangulated with the quantitative data, resulting qualitative improvement in QoL in the dramatherapy group was justified.

Keywords

Embodiment, projection, role, dramatherapy, feeling intelligence, mixed method.

Introduction

Dramatherapy is a modality which helps people to experience themselves as embodied human beings within the full range of their feeling life. One of the definitions of dramatherapy is my own, under the rubric of the Dramatherapy Centre, Sydney, as follows:

Dramatherapy intentionally uses theatre and drama techniques to encourage the client's creativity and expressive ability. It helps the clients to tell their story, express feelings, set goals, extend inner experience and try on new and more fulfilling roles so far unexplored. (Dramatherapy Centre, 2018)

As dramatherapists, we use interventions to help clients to address real-life relationships and social situations. We encourage them to play with their lifescipt, telling their story in a new way, often with role-play and improvisation. We sometimes assist them to achieve a deeper self-understanding through mask, puppetry and other distancing techniques. The attitudes and life experiences of people who have dementia, although varied, are generally not nearly as universally negative as some literature and media outlets suggest (Hulko, 2009). When dramatherapists apply a sensitive developmental model of practice such as EPR/RPE, participants are given the opportunity to express their identity, as well as their hopes and fears. There has been little written by developmental psychologists about the later human life stages (Jaaniste, 2016). Tornstam's

work suggests that "a shift in meta-perspective from a materialistic and rational view to a more cosmic and transcendent one" (2005, p.41) is brought about through actually experiencing the challenges of old age, as the participants in this project showed they could do with grace. This article advocates for an opportunity for elders with dementia to express themselves through feeling intelligence and physical movement according to their stage in life and in doing so to improve their QoL.

Embodiment, Projection and Role (EPR)

EPR techniques are extremely useful for the dramatherapist in selecting interventions for all populations. These three different kinds of interventions can be used for assessment purposes in individual or group dramatherapy. It became clear to the author that the order could be reversed with elderly people and this reversal offers the opportunity to find ways for the dramatherapist to use the technique with them so that it fulfils the needs of their life stage (Jennings, 1999, pp.51–53; Jennings & Jaaniste, 2016).

Embodiment:

The interventions for embodiment issues involve engaging the client in movement and gesture. These non-cognitive exercises can assist clients, who may have had disturbing bodily experiences, to permit touch and gain somatic self-awareness. They are usually not among initial interventions used with

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