

Imprinted: The use of simple printmaking techniques in arts therapy

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Abstract

This article describes an action research project undertaken as part of my Master of Arts in Arts Therapy (Clinical), which explored the use of simple printmaking techniques within an arts therapy group for young adults. I outline, through session vignettes, participant quotations and discussion, how printmaking in the arts therapy context was experienced by participants. My findings demonstrate that printmaking within a Focusing-Oriented Arts Therapy (FOAT) framework can aid expression of the felt sense and stimulate felt shifts in perspective. These findings showcase the freedom, containment and spontaneity of printmaking, arguing for its inclusion in the toolkit of more arts therapists.

Keywords

Printmaking, FOAT, action research, young adults

Introduction

Printmaking is an art form that usually calls to mind complex processes, harsh chemicals, sharp tools and heavy presses – not necessarily things that can or should readily be incorporated into arts therapy. However, in considering simpler printmaking processes (those that require minimal, easy-to-handle tools, non-toxic materials and are printed by hand), it becomes apparent that there is every reason we should be using this versatile, diverse and surprising art form in arts therapy.

In my personal arts practice, printmaking has helped me to express feelings, creatively solve problems and experience myself in new ways, which has led to my faith that printmaking and arts therapy are natural partners. Consequently, I have been surprised by the absence of printmaking in the arts therapy field. There has been some discussion in the literature about printmaking as therapy (Mueller White, 2002; Dean, 2015, 2016), but few case studies and no examples from New Zealand. My master's research project intended to begin to fill this gap, by showcasing the use of simple printmaking techniques within arts therapy.

I ran an arts therapy group for three young-adult participants which utilised simple forms of printmaking as its primary arts modality within a Focusing-Oriented Arts Therapy (FOAT) (Rappaport, 2009) framework. I sought to

investigate how printmaking was experienced in a therapeutic setting by clients, whether it was a meaningful way for them to express their 'felt sense', whether it was flexible enough to allow space for the 'felt shift', and if it could help facilitate a sense of trust in the process of arts therapy.

The literature

Arts therapy and trust

Arts therapy involves a three-way process between the client, the therapist and the art (Case & Dalley, 2014). Furthermore, art-making is a process in itself – one that involves improvisation, instinct, and responding to the moment. What this requires is trust: in oneself, in others, and in the process (Allen, 1995; Atkins & Eberhart, 2014; McNiff, 1998; Moon, 2008).

The experience of making art within therapy has been compared by Knill, Barba and Fuchs (2004) to entering a liminal or threshold space. Entering this alternative reality requires an opening of the heart and mind to something universal (Atkins & Eberhart, 2014). One must be willing to try, to test, to tolerate, to trust; or as Emanuel (2016) puts it, allow an "informed surrender" to letting the art therapy "do" us (p.588). Knill et al. (2005) mirror this notion with their assertion that poiesis, the act of bringing something new

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