

Book review

Dramatherapy with children, young people and schools: Enabling creativity, sociability, communication and learning

Edited by Lauraine Leigh, Irvine Gersch, Ann Dix and Deborah Haythorne

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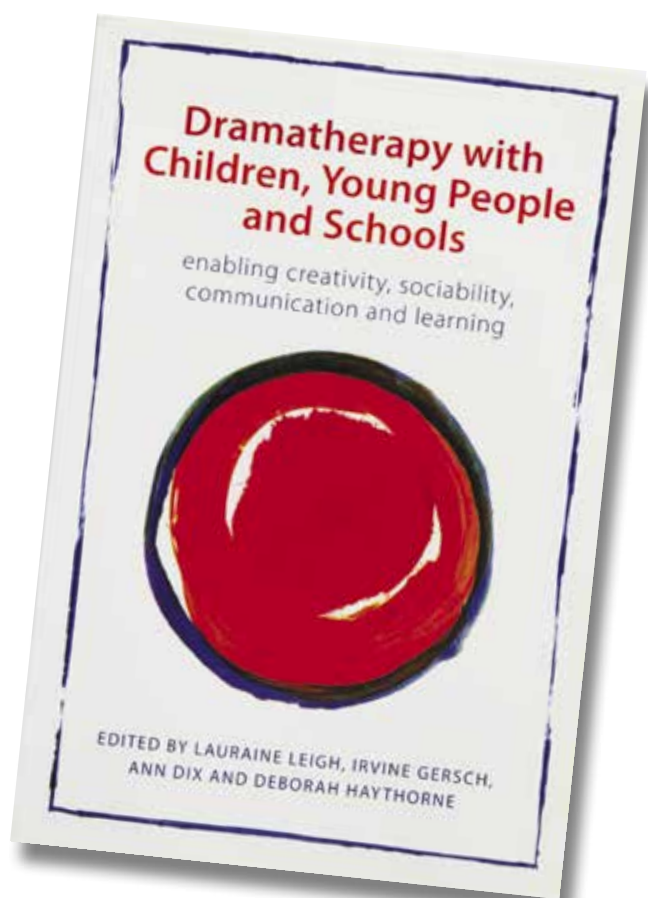
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Reviewed by Caroline Miller

This book looks at the place of dramatherapy in schools, and I found it a varied and rich read. It is comprehensive, interesting and informative, and makes a strong case for the inclusion of dramatherapy in schools. While the focus is on dramatherapy, the book is equally applicable to any arts therapists working in schools.

There are five sections. 'Part I: Introduction' looks at the separation of services for children which has been the norm in the United Kingdom and in those countries with education systems derived from the British system, like Australia and New Zealand, which separate cognitive learning from emotional learning. The writers point to increasing numbers of children who go to school each day unable to learn because they take with them a range of practical and emotional problems including the effects of poverty, violence and substance abuse by the adults in the home. This section contains ideas about boundaries and collaboration between therapy and teaching and between therapists and teachers, including differentiation between drama teaching and drama therapy. The chapters in Part I outline relevant legislation and major reports on child services, which have been influenced by different models of provision, as well as by the social need which is evident in most schools.

'Part II: Case studies' contains reports of dramatherapy with children and young people with diverse needs reflected in Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), sexual abuse, chaos and anger, self harm, child psychosis,



bereavement, problems of family dynamics and the need for children to build resilience in the face of difficulties. Some reference is made to neuroscience, and the growing understanding this gives of children's behaviours and needs. There are indications of how frequently schools are seeking help for behaviour management and how dramatherapy can help young people to better manage their own behaviour. The case studies illustrate different ways in which dramatherapists work within schools and develop working relationships with school staff.

'Part III: Collaborative partnerships in schools and beyond' addresses those relationships which can support or destroy a dramatherapist's work in a school. In particular, it is important to gain an understanding of how each school works, and to have good liaison with relevant teachers and special needs co-ordinators (SENCOs), as well as with decision makers who allocate space and who administer funding. This may involve the dramatherapist in educating some staff about dramatherapy and what it can offer. More general issues about where dramatherapy, or any therapy might fit, within schools, and boundaries around the sharing of information and limits of confidentiality are also discussed.

'Part IV: Evidence and outcomes' considers the development of the PSYCHLOPS Kids evaluation and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire as examples of existing measures which are appropriate for children and young people. There are possibilities for measures designed around the client. This section also contains suggestions about other types of programme evaluation by another professional group, such as education psychologists or SENCOs. Schools are currently oriented towards outcomes and measurement, and it is useful to be able to speak that language as well as ensuring that any evaluation is appropriate for the modality, and for the developmental level of the client/s.

'Part V: Future possibilities' includes a focus on what children think they need in school, an example of an external programme evaluation, a model of emotional support and an outline of some future possibilities.

The book contains 23 chapters, written by dramatherapists, clinical and education psychologists and teachers, a psychiatrist, performers and artists, psychotherapists, psychodramatists, and play therapists. Each of these may be working in schools, in private practice, in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, in therapist training programmes, in social services or in community organisations like Roundabout. The writers offer a variety of perspectives, which present a richness of ideas

around the theme of each section of the book so that they complement each other well and stimulate further thought.

With teachers asking dramatherapists to work in schools with students with difficulties, there are indications that the separation of 'areas of children's lives such as health, education, social care, recreation and play' (Jones, p.17) are being challenged. The school could be the location for a range of services to help children and young people and their families in an accessible and coherent way. It can also offer a location where arts therapists find opportunities for work. For arts therapists already working in schools, and for those who wish to work in schools this book is a valuable resource presenting a multi-faceted view of the complexities, opportunities and relationships involved.

Other relevant reading

Crimmens, P. (2006). *Drama therapy and storymaking in special education*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Karkou, V. (Ed.). (2010). *Arts therapies in schools research and practice*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.