ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

Social Dreaming Matrix

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The following is a report of the conference Social dreaming experience. It includes: an outline of the Social Dreaming model used at the conference, the methodology used to draw hypotheses, hypotheses and further questions about art therapy and the conference itself viewed as interacting systems. In the report I use the following abbreviations: SD for Social Dreaming, SDM for Social Dreaming Matrix, DRD for Dream Reflection Dialogue, DCR for Dream Creative Response, SS for System Synthesis.

Outline of the SD Model

The Social Dreaming programme for the International Conference consisted of three, distinct Social Dreaming Matrices, of one and a half hours each, taking place during the morning of each day of the conference. Each workshop was articulated in two separate parts. Specifically and for each workshop these were: a Social Dreaming Matrix (SDM) with a brief introductory explanation and brief Dream Reflection Dialogues (DRD), conducted in small groups. This represented a shortened version of the canonical SD method, which would have required more time than was available on this occasion. Ordinarily the SD program would include a meta analysis of all the SDMs and DRDs in terms of themes and forming ideas. Time would be spent formulating and considering hypotheses about the state of the system the SD programme applied to, in the concluding part of the SD, the System Synthesis (SS).

It is important to reiterate that this method is a non-clinical intervention and despite its experiential nature it is not concerned with the analysis of either group processes, or with dreams' personal significance. The process is a transpersonal one, aimed at acquiring knowledge about the system and the focus is always on the dreams, not the dreamers.

The physical setting was assessed to accommodate up to 75 people sitting in a star or snowflake formation. There was no obligation for participants to attend both, or either workshops. In the event attendance to each Matrix remained around 50 to 60. The three Matrices were hosted by myself and Caroline Frizell. Senior members of the teaching staff facilitated the small groups DRD.

The overarching question for the entire SD programme was: *'What is the current state of Art Therapy in the World?'* Delegates participating to the SD were invited to take the outcome of their process and thinking back to the conference as a whole and in its various component, including the large art making experiential groups and the final Plenary.

Methodology used to draw Hypotheses

The SD programme hosts, Caroline Frizell and I, took notes during the Matrices. About half way into the third Matrix my pens run out and, to avoid disrupting the process, I left Caroline to continue the work of documenting the dream and association sequence. I later reviewed the information I had, drawing together themes and images, which appeared to dominate each matrix and considered how the narratives and themes followed, contradicted and supported each other. I identified and separated strands of dream sequences from salient dreams they were leading to. This process is not viewing some dreams as more valuable than others, but rather aims at gathering together the more vague or general narrative sequences and articulate their significance through key dream images.

For each Matrix I drew out sets of themes and eventually I attempted to formulate hypotheses based on the data received. Hypotheses are not theories; they are ideas, questions and thoughts formed from a process of

distillation of the entire SD process and further processed by the hosts, at a different time and separately from the actual SD event. The hypotheses are the expression of hunches, of the possibility that certain thoughts and questions may be around unconsciously or pre-consciously and become more explicit through the associative sharing of the dreams.

Themes, Hypotheses and Further Questions

Themes from SDM 1:

- *Wolves, Foxes, Tigers, Cats:* wild and not so wild animals, give way to *Angels and Witches*. Here we have something wild and 'other', something idealised and perceived as helpful as *The Guardian Angel,* but also difficult to describe. *Witches* are the containers for demonised and objectified attributes while, at the same time and like Angels, not quite real.

- *Waves and Floods* - Land is being covered by water and something emerges that can live under water. *Archaeology* emerges - The history of something is being witnessed.

- *Francis Bacon and Lucien Freud* - They are authorities and grand-parents in the world of Art. In addition, *Freud* also associating us with the ascendency of Psychoanalysis. In both dreams with Bacon and Freud *the Studios are melting, or breaking down.*

Hypotheses - these refer to the Conference and Art Therapy.

- ❖ Art Therapy has come through evolutions and stages. Possibly emerging from a stage with mythical figures that were placed in rather objectified and polarised positions? These could be schools, or orientations.

- ❖ Perhaps the world of Art Therapy feels again a bit wild and scary on the one hand, and yet familiar and comforting on the other - but when new avenues (*rooms*) are found, fear and diffidence return.

- ❖ Perhaps there is a sense that there may be something treacherous, which can bite us (*friends and cousins biting).*

The change over from old authorities (*Bacon and Freud)* may feel as if the known land is being flooded and the old order is melting down.

Themes from the SDM 2:

- The 2nd Matrix was heavier in associations than in dreams - this could be in itself an important phenomenon; in order to learn more about it a full System Synthesis reflective phase would have been necessary.
- *Cheese-* something nutritious and also fermented. Alive with enzymes and rotting. Can we live on cheese? Who is the *Big Cheese?* This can be a socially defining symbol - better cheese, good quality cheese.
- *Angels and Boxes -* They intermingle and the Angels seem to be the messengers of something new. The *Angel Gabriel* is the annunciation's angel. Boxes may connect with the idea of classification and multiple containers. *Russian Dolls* are boxes of a kind, but also contain each other. *A Russian Doll* essentially contains a number of versions of itself.
- *Affiliation -* several dreams deal with *name changing: Names are changed and animals change their identity into each other.*

Hypotheses:
- ❖ Is the profession navel gazing? Is the profession being narcissistic?
- ❖ Is the profession coming to a stage of evolution where old orders are being rebelled against? Those who were the parents in the training of art therapists are now grandparents and a new generation of parents/authority is in power?
- ❖ Is Art therapy reaching a developmental milestone?
- ❖ Do we hope to be able to classify knowledge and methodologies neatly into boxes with homogeneous content? Are we embarrassed by such hopes?

Themes from SDM 3:
- Opening dream is *of crossing a bridge and questions being rebuked and mocked -* a point of transition is being reached and it is followed by terrifying flooding.

- *New Born Babies* - something new being witnessed, but also being lost sight of (*forgetting the baby in the flat, left outside the shop in a pram)*. The experience of change being experienced as terrifying, like a Tsunami. Something new is *drowned* and then identified with. Also *Twins but Black and White;* substantially diverging?
- *Clay pigeon shooting, being shot at, Death rising from the toes upward…-* something quite violent and also transformed in violence without victims (*clay pigeon*).

Hypotheses:

- ❖ Is the profession of Art therapy reached a tipping point, a kind of bridge that admits no questions?
- ❖ Are we witnessing the birth of new paradigms and presences in the profession, which feels both threatening and overwhelming?
- ❖ Are we 'shooting ourselves in the foot'?

From the DCR

There was no Dream Creative Response in this programme. However participants were invited to reflect and elaborate on all themes brought up by the SD, within all other parts of the conference. I believe some images were created in the evening large groups that were thematic responses to the SD.

To view images go to: https://goo.gl/photos/wyXMgXJNjeJKqYnB6