

«Let me see HOW you do it? » Playing, Puppets and Dramatherapy with Disabled Children, Adolescents and Adults in the Autistic Spectrum with Associated Syndromes

Irina Katz-Mazilu*

France.

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ABSTRACT

Asking « How? » instead of « Why? » is involving the client in acting, moving, tracing...from the start. It is postulating that he/she is alive and present-which is synonymous to doing something: breathing, watching, hearing, sleeping, waiting, dreaming, eating, walking, playing, creating, or even « nothing ». The response in itself as well as an absence of response, either verbal or embodied, is actually an action which offers the possibility of initiating a relationship with the client situated in a leading position. It is important to do subtle observation before instauring the best way to work with each one. Using multiple media in puppetry-visual, sound, movement offers large opportunities in choice and decision making. Participants train to be present, open, creative, collaborative. This is resource full even if little or no language is available. Making and playing with puppets in one-to-one or in small groups with disabled/autistic children, adolescents and adults aged 10 to 50 was an interesting experience.

The main principles were:

- Inclusiveness: all the participants including arts therapists and internship students were members of a theater company
- Each one contributed according to his/her capacities
- All the time needed was allowed in each one's way and rhythm
- No judgement, no corrections except if help was asked
- Using mainly improvisation, thus lowering the anxiety about not knowing/forgetting what to do in the play

The process started with fabricating the puppets, then went on with improvisations developing a story and ended with a final presentation of the puppet show which was a joyful shared time with the families, the educators and friends. This method requires from therapists and students a long term patience and a great availability but offers very positive therapeutic results on the transference level. It appears that in this way it is possible to address traumatic memories from previous unsuccessful experiences, thus restoring self-esteem and mutual trust. The participants are happy with the workshop and proud to show and share their creative abilities.

Keywords: Puppets, Therapeutic process, Arts therapy, Inclusiveness, Action

Corresponding author: Irina Katz-Mazilu, France, E-mail: irina.katzmazilu@gmail.com

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