Chapter 7. Making Sense of the Acts
—Using The 6-Key Model To Assess a
Dramatherapy Session With a Child

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Dramatherapy: processes take place on so many planes at once that it is often hard for therapists to navigate this multi-levelled ocean of images, incidences, characters, and plots, without losing their sense of direction and balance: Shall one focus on the story, the roles, the therapeutic relationship, or the acting/playing skills? How is it possible to make a relevant assessment of these numerous levels of interactions? In order to make sense of the process, dramatherapists utilize an assortment of assessment methods and tools.

Some of these are primarily role-based (Johnson, 2012; Landy & Butler, 2012; Snow et.al, 2009); others are story-oriented (Lahad & Dent-Brown 2012; Landy & Butler 2012), while others rely on dramatic abilities and developmental play theories as a means to assess the client’s functioning in dramatic reality (Cleven, 2012; Jennings, 2012; Jones, 1996; Pitruzzella, 2010). In addition, psychological or psychiatric assessment tools are used by practitioners, either in combination with dramatherapy approaches or on their own (Dokter, 2012). Although these methods often cover a
portion of the dramatherapy process, they usually leave some aspects aside (Pendzik, 2013).

The 6-key Model is an integrative dramatherapy-based approach to assessment, which is rooted in the notion of dramatic reality. This fundamental concept can be regarded as the essence of dramatherapy, and its main contribution to the therapeutic field. Dramatic reality can be defined as 'a category of experience that is unique to dramatic interaction, which involves a tangible entrance into an imaginary realm, engaging in make-believe play, in 'as if' behaviour, etc.' (Pendzik, 2006, p. 33). Dramatic reality involves the materialization of imagination: It is the incarnation of the imaginary realm in the here and now, an embodied construct that becomes visible through the meditation of drama as well as other artistic means. Regardless of the particular approach that a practitioner uses, a dramatherapy session always comprises a journey from ordinary reality into dramatic reality—and back. This journey constitutes the essence of dramatherapy; in its course, the contents brought into dramatic reality by the client are expressed, validated, explored, witnessed, and owned. ‘In fact, it is via this contact with the potential world of dramatic reality that personal and psychological contents become transformed’ (Pendzik, 2013, p. 91).

The relationship between everyday life reality and dramatic reality can be roughly compared to the one between territory and map. However, in the case of ordinary reality and dramatic reality, the analogy's scope has to be expanded: It is not just that the map replicates the characteristics of the territory, but also that it reflects a person's ability to even read a map or draw one! In other words, the particular relationship that people establish with dramatic reality can give us information about many aspects of their life, including their social patterns, cognitive abilities, psy-

7. Making Sense of the Acts

Psychological makeup, inner world, and so on (Pendzik, 2012 & 2013).

The 6-Key Model looks at all the aspects that may be said to be reflective of the binomial 'ordinary reality-dramatic reality'. These 'anchor points' (Smitskamp, 1996), are core parameters around which drama therapy processes constellate, and they seem to hold most of the elements encompassed by dramatic reality and its relation to ordinary reality. They include: (1) an ability to transport oneself to and from ordinary reality; (2) a particular quality and style; (3) roles and characters; (4) content patterns, such as plot, themes, conflicts, and symbols; (5) a response to the created reality; and (6) a place for the ineffable: the unsaid, the subjectively perceived. The following table briefly states the substance of each key, and some of the questions that can be formulated around it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Content</th>
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| 1st | Passage | Concerns the transition between realities.  
- Is the person able to make the transition in and out?  
- Do they make it on their own?  
- Do they need help? What helps?  
- Are the differences between the realities clear to the person? |
### 7. Making Sense of the Acts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Content</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td><em>Refers to the response/evaluation/reaction/critique of the client to what was performed in dramatic reality, after s/he is back in normal reality. Seat of the ‘inner critic.’</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 6th | Meta-level | *Ineffable contents.*  
- A subjective, intuitively perceived level containing implied matters that have not been expressed or even formulated (neither in dramatic nor in ordinary reality).  
- Site of transferential aspects (transference/countertransference).  
- Collective unconscious contents  
- Contents that are still brewing, gestating. |

The 6-Key Model is a qualitative form of assessment, based on the subjective observation of the therapist. By breaking down the sequence of a session into these six parameters, dramatherapists are able to survey the main therapeutic processes at play in that session. Reflection upon the keys usually points to a charged key (or two), from which the therapeutic intervention would be most effective. Once the charged key is identified, it is possible to consider potential interventions within this key, which would have the greatest impact on the whole therapeutic process (Pendzik, 2008). The model intersects with other methods, both from dramatherapy and from related fields, as each key refers to a different aspect of the dramatherapeutic process. For example, if the 3rd key (roles and characters) is detected, interventions based on Landy’s (2009) role method can be applied.
The observations can be registered by taking notes in the 6-Key Model Working Diagram (Figure 1). This diagram is not exactly a checklist in which the categories have to be filled systematically, but it is meant to be used creatively by the therapist, as it suits the particular session being documented (Figure 2). For instance, the recording may start in any key. In fact, oftentimes, the key which the therapist finds easier to fill in the first place may be indicative of the charged key. Likewise, it is not necessary to choose a single category for each aspect that is being registered: the material can be recorded in two categories at once, as the overlaps may reflect more authentically the spirit of the session. For example, the appearance of a character usually brings up an issue or a conflict as well. The therapist can record both, the character (3rd key) and the issue (4th key). Upon reflection on the whole system, the more effective intervention can be chosen.

Figure 1. Six-key model
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Dramatherapy for Traumatized Children

Case example: A session with Ella

Background and context

The following is a case example of one session with a girl, about eleven years old, which took place at a Jewish ultra-orthodox, all-girls elementary school. The case was referred to Gital Poupko, who was working at the time as a dramatherapist in the school. Ella (not her real name) attended weekly individual dramatherapy sessions of forty-five minutes, for one and a half academic years. The sessions took place in a fairly large, carpeted room, which alternately served other creative arts therapists.

Ella was the fourth in a family of five children. Although she displayed above average intelligence, and had only slight learning disabilities, she was placed in a special-needs classroom, mainly due to her behavioural issues (it was assumed that she would cope better in a small class). In the fifth grade, Ella was referred to therapy by her teachers, who were very concerned about her emotional state and aberrant behaviour. She was popular socially, but did not seem to have any close friends, and none of her teachers was able to make any meaningful connection with her. Ella did not do any schoolwork, although she did attend school regularly. She was often disruptive in class, for example, telling jokes to make her friends laugh. Her preferred spot in the classroom was perched on top of the cupboard ‘like a monkey.’ It was very difficult to get her to come down and sit in her seat.

For months, Ella would come to the dramatherapy sessions, happy to get away from class, but not interested in doing very much. It was rare for her to engage deeply in any activity. She was drawn to the piano, and occasionally, she and Gital im-

vised playing it together. Other times, she might sing some songs, accompanying herself minimally at the keys. These were popular ‘secular’ songs, which she was not allowed to sing at school. At times she spoke about her older sister, who wore make-up, and had a boyfriend—both completely taboo at home as well as at school. She taught Gital songs that her sister taught her. She seemed to enjoy Gital’s non-judgmental stance and appreciation for these ‘forbidden’ pursuits. But she had not quite placed her trust in Gital. The session described herein constituted a turning point within her therapeutic process. It occurred after they had been meeting for several months.

Description of the session

Ella comes in, somehow both restless and subdued. She roams around the room, climbing on chairs, on stairs, then jumping off them, even stepping on and off the table. I follow along behind her, climbing, jumping, stepping up, then down. She notes my mirroring with a gaze that seems to say -- this is peculiar, but if you want to follow my lead, OK, go right ahead. At some point, she begins to challenge me, deliberately picking up the pace, climbing on higher and higher surfaces, almost flying off, while somehow landing lightly on her feet, cat-like. She checks periodically, to see how I am holding up, smiling at my efforts, laughing once when I fall too far behind. What felt at first like a dance she was teaching me, now feels more like a race, or perhaps, a test. I am conscious of thinking “So how am I doing? I hope I am not failing too badly ...” I become aware of Ella’s agility, grace and stamina, as compared with my somewhat labored efforts to keep up. Rather abruptly, Ella stops careening, and drops onto a chair. I sit on a chair nearby. We are both breathing hard. I feel my pulse racing from
the physical effort, and it seems to me that for a few moments our chests rise and fall in unison.

My pulse gradually returns to normal, and I focus my gaze on Ella's face. She looks deeply into my eyes for a second, and then folds over, dropping her head onto her arms, crossed on the tabletop. She remains that way for several minutes. I wait, focusing my attention on her. I notice that her body now conveys utter exhaustion. Finally, she raises her head, sitting up straight. She looks less animated, very tired, but also calmer. For a moment she looks toward the door, and I wonder if she will ask to leave early, something that has happened several times in the past. Instead she notices a puppet on a side table, left behind by another girl. She picks up the puppet, turning it over in her hands. She has never been interested in using any art materials, in creating any dolls, or in using any of the dolls, figurines or miniatures present in the room. The puppet is somewhat crudely made and obviously unfinished. Ella asks me who it belongs to. I tell her that another girl started making it, but decided not to continue. She did not want to keep it and essentially abandoned it. I tell her that I did not want to throw it away. Ella seems fascinated by the unfinished doll. She asks if she can have it. I tell her she can. She sits and holds the puppet in her hands, looking intently at its very large eyes, small nose and lack of a mouth. I offer her to continue creating the puppet, to make additions or changes. She shakes her head “no.” I tell her we can play with the puppet as-is. She nods slowly. I suggest that she experiment, see how she thinks this character might move. Ella seems uncertain, and moves the puppet a fraction, then stops. She moves the puppet a tiny bit more, looking to me for reassurance. I comment that the puppet doesn't seem to want to move much. Ella almost smiles. I wonder aloud if the puppet wants to talk, so we can hear its voice.

7. Making Sense of the Acts

Ella immediately begins to speak as the puppet.

“I have no mouth. I cannot say anything with my mouth. I can only talk with my eyes. My eyes hurt so much because it is so hard to always talk with my eyes.”

“Yes, that must hurt a lot,” I reply to the puppet.

“Yes, it hurts my eyes.”

“And do people understand when you talk with your eyes?” I ask the puppet.

“No, usually they don’t, but sometimes they do.”

Ella puts the puppet down on the table. She seems completely exhausted by her effort. I sense how significant this brief exchange was for Ella personally. I want to help her create a sense of distance, and ask her to give the puppet a name. She looks again at the puppet's large eyes, and tells me her name is Sarah.

I suggest we find a safe place where Sarah can rest until next week. Ella opens the cabinet, and examines the shelves inside. She says she wants to put Sarah on the highest shelf, one we have to stand on a chair in order to reach (I am only slightly taller than Ella). I show her an assortment of boxes she can choose from, if she wishes. Ella plucks the top box off the stack, places Sarah inside, and puts the lid on the box. I say: “Bye, Sarah, see you next week.” I imagine Ella may echo “Bye, Sarah” but she does not. She writes her name—Ella—in large letters across the top of the box. We place the box on the highest shelf, which is otherwise empty. Ella says goodbye and races out of the room.
7. Making Sense of the Acts

Analysis of the session

The session can be regarded as featuring two main 'acts' separated by an intermission. The first act was the wordless embodiment interaction; the second, the doll scene. Figure 2 illustrates the recording of the session using the 6-Key Working Diagram. In the first act, embodiment was very central to entering dramatic reality (1st key): Ella's roaming through the space was restless and without clear direction. There seemed to be an electric current running through her, in need of discharge or grounding. Although Gital's following and mirroring caught Ella by surprise, she accepted them as something 'bizarre' that this peculiar therapist chooses to do (3rd key—characters and roles). Gital's joining served to validate and intensify the sensory experience, thus allowing the interaction to acquire an 'as if' dimension. As this seemingly aimless (impulsive?) climbing and jumping, with Ella in the lead, transformed into a synchronized dance, the quality feature emerged (2nd key).

Entrance was signalled by the apparent aesthetic pleasure that Ella took in the experience, in finding inventive ways to explore the space, spontaneously creating moves, such as leaping on and off tables, or strangely angled chairs and objects. Ella's energetic stomping became more graceful and light-footed, while at the same time, her moves became more challenging and daring.

During the first act, Ella underwent a metamorphosis of sorts in the 3rd key (roles and characters), as her initially restless romp through the room brought out the role of the dancer in her, which then morphed into a spontaneous choreographer, charged with creating and leading the dance. Throughout the synchronized dance, it was very clear that Ella was the leader, while Gital was
Dramatherapy For Traumatized Children

the follower. As the speed increased, and the intensity grew, the
dance seemed to evolve into a test (keys 2 & 4), and Ella’s check-
ing whether Gital was keeping up and executing the moves prop-
ery turned her into something of an examiner. She devised chal-
enges for Gital to meet and tested her ability to stand up to ex-
pectations: Would she follow Ella’s lead? Could she be trusted?
Did she have the stamina to accompany Ella on a demanding,
unpredictable journey? Did she have the flexibility to adapt to
spontaneous shifts and varying speeds? Was she a worthy part-
ner? All these themes are features of the 4th key (content pat-
terns); but they probably had been ‘brewing’ for both Ella and Gi-
tal in the 6th key (the ineffable) for quite some time. As the ‘test’
phase came to an end, its contents achieved an implicit acknowl-
edgement: Ella and Gital remained silently connected, ‘breathing
in unison,’ briefly staring at each other. The ineffable issues
which had been trapped in the 6th key were discharged as con-
tents of the 4th key! Gital had passed the Test—both the real and
the symbolic one.

The second act begins with a sense of ‘happenstance’ in finding
the doll. Here the passage into dramatic reality was facilitated
though a projective tool (1st key). Perhaps the fact that it was
found (rather than made by her) met Ella’s need for aesthetic dis-
tance. As Brooker (2010) claims, a found object may support the
cognitive “process of thinking outside of self and informing a
sense of self at the same time” (p. 34). Furthermore, the puppet
was unfinished, and it was very significant to Ella when Gital
assured her that she could play with it as-is. As had happened in
the first act, this license to play with ‘what is,’ served as a gate-
way to dramatic reality and constituted a defining aspect of its
style as well (2nd key). Ella was encouraged to experiment with the
piece of ‘found art’ she had discovered, to play with how it might
move, to allow it to find its own voice, etc.—a free play that ev-
tually evolved into the unique character of Sarah.

The doll had several features that helped to define her as a role:
she was an unfinished puppet, and moreover, unwanted by the
child who had begun creating her—she was an abandoned doll. It
seemed very meaningful to Ella that when the previous girl
abandoned the doll, Gital did not want to throw her away.
Though she may have been unwanted by her creator, she had
been kept by Gital. Perhaps Ella received the message that in
this therapy room, in this relationship, there are no unwanted
dolls, unfinished or imperfect though they may be. In allowing
Ella to keep the doll as her own, Gital essentially enabled her to
adopt the abandoned doll.

By making an informed intervention in the 3rd key (roles and
characters), Gital was also effectively attending to the 4th key
(content patterns). A meaningful symbol, which had several re-
fractions, both within dramatic reality and without, was that of
eyes. The sense of ‘breathing in unison’ was sealed by Ella’s look-
ing deeply into Gital eyes, however briefly. In between the two
acts of the session, Ella’s eyes were actually closed, her head low-
ered to her crossed arms for several moments, before she was
ready to continue. Upon reflection, Gital asked herself whether
this might have been the first time during those months of their
relationship that she had really made significant eye contact.
This gaze was followed by Ella’s awareness of the large eyes of
the unfinished puppet, and the image of Sarah as a character
that ‘speaks with her eyes’—with the emphasis on the pain that
she experienced as a result. The image of pain was an intense
one—the pain of having no mouth, of having to find an alterna-
tive voice, of speaking with one’s eyes, of not being understood.
There was a hint of potential for healing in the idea that it was
Dramatherapy for Traumatized Children

possible to find a voice, and even to be understood, although this was a rare experience. This was actually the first time that Ella was able to sustain a dialogue in role. It was both ironic and utterly significant that she first found her voice via a doll which had no mouth!

Naming the character and finding a safe place to keep the puppet between sessions were further interventions made by Gital in the 3rd key in order to deepen Sarah's differentiation as a character and help with the process of de-roling. Ella's response was to place Sarah on the highest possible shelf, where she could only be reached by standing on a chair, and to close her in a box, with a lid. There was a sense of preserving something precious, significant, but no less, something which may not be easily accessed, which may need to be hidden. Ella's writing her own name boldly across the lid, seeing to it that her name appears prominently on Sarah's box, may have had had a dual meaning as a response—both claiming Sarah as entirely her own, as well as warning off anyone else from opening the box (5th key—response).

To summarize, this session marked a turning point in the therapeutic process of Ella. Up to that moment, there was no significant entrance into dramatic reality, as the quality of Ella's engagement in it had been rather fleeting and superficial. Her lack of authenticity was perceived by Gital who described Ella as "happy to get away from class, but not interested in doing very much." In contrast to this, the 'real issues' were bubbling in the 6th key, which was charged with transferential concerns connected to trust, acceptance, and bizarreness. When the ineffable contents of the 6th key could be channeled into a dramatic reality that was good enough to hold them (1st and 2nd keys), interventions could be made in the 3rd key (roles and characters). The test that Gital had to pass was connected to the 3rd key: It was a 'role' test. She had to prove that she was as playful and peculiar as a monkey, as agile and cautious as a cat, as trustworthy as Ella's sister, as reliable and accepting as an adoptive mother.

Each 'act' in this session had a different charged key. It is noticeable from Gital's description that, prior to this meeting, most of the work had focused on developing Ella's ability to enter and have a meaningful stay in dramatic reality (1st and 2nd keys). This was achieved in the present session through the release of the 6th key—the charged key of the first act. The unexpressed issues of the 6th key were impairing the proper functioning of the 1st and 2nd keys by allowing only a shallow quality of dramatic reality—one that could not hold the deeper story that Ella had to share. Once the ineffable attained a meaningful expression in dramatic reality through the 'role test,' the 3rd key became the charged one, and the character of Sarah was born. Further work was to be done in this key, as well as in the 4th key—as usually characters bring along other content patterns (pain, eyes, not having a mouth, speaking-shutting up, etc.).

Conclusion

The 6-Key Model is a qualitative method for organizing and reflecting upon dramatherapy processes from a dramatherapy-based perspective. The model provides an integrative picture of these processes and furnishes practitioners with six parameters for assessment, which are in constant dialogue with other methods and theories; it reveals the charged points, thus helping the dramatherapist to choose specific interventions that would advance more effectively the therapeutic process. It can be applied to individuals or groups, and used to survey a single session or a general process.
Dramatherapy for Traumatized Children

The 6-Key Model works as a compass that keeps dramatherapists 'pointing north,' toward dramatic reality and all its ramifications. This is always necessary in a terrain that can be as rough and chaotic as a dramatherapy session; but it is particularly crucial when working within the educational system, where dramatherapy is only one of the languages spoken—and probably not the dominant one. One can easily lose the way in big systems, such as schools or hospitals, which are not necessarily attuned to dramatherapy fundamentals. Moreover, while the model is firmly rooted in the core notion of dramatic reality, it draws from diverse outlooks and theoretical frameworks, allowing these viewpoints to coalesce into an integrated vision. As such, it may also serve as a vital mediator between practitioners with a variety of approaches and methodologies within the realm of psychotherapy. Thus, the model's ability to bridge different perspectives may indeed be very valuable in the context of a school.

Chapter 8. Dramatherapy Tools for School Counselling

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of dramatherapy tools that can be used in the school setting. These interventions are enriching, stimulating, pragmatic, and therapeutic.¹ For school counsellors, it is important to equip with a wide range of interventions to address the many issues that are brought by the children. Selecting the appropriate intervention depends on the counsellor's theoretical orientation, the student's developmental level, and the particular issue that is being addressed. School counsellors will benefit by incorporating these tools, such as art, reading, writing, music, and play, with traditional counselling methods. In fact, traditional counselling will have increased effectiveness with the support of these tools. Creative interventions get children “doing” rather than thinking, and thus can be more activating than verbal counselling.² For adolescents especially, departure from traditional talk therapy is a requirement.³

Using dramatherapy tools with school children will build a good counselling relationship and promote healthy communication between the school counsellor and student. It will help students

References


