

The 'Mystery Shopper' report on the Sixth Exeter Arts and Therapies Conference: May 2007.

Carole Pembroke.

These thoughts were presented to initiate the 'Conference Findings' session at the end of the day.

Michael Edwards

I loved the idea of gathering 'the bits together' within a context. Michael placed importance on it not always being possible for there to be a scientific explanation, and he went on to stress that there should always be room for ambiguity within therapeutic work. Michael later made links within a scientific context to the 'not knowing' within quantum physics, an idea of particular relevance and a reasoned argument when challenged concerning a scientific versus arts based practice. I particularly liked his quote 'that the arts are the custodians of the soul', because for me without considering the arts and the soul, healing cannot take place.

Susie Needham

I thought Susie's work was stunning and on a personal level found the images very affecting. Here were images, drawn with light, which captured a ghostly quality, the past, and the identity of the wearer. The images produced within me a feeling of sorrow for past babies clothes, and a wish that I had kept some of my children's clothing. It felt as though so many clothing memories had been thrown away.

Mark Hayward

Mark's talk made me consider again how externalizing 'the problem' helps those he works with. This led on to thinking about the links which could be made between art therapy and narrative therapy - of how making art work during therapy also externalises 'the problem', while containing subconscious feelings and thoughts. Mark recounted words used by clients to externalise

their 'problem' which in turn conjured up vivid images in my head. I wondered if Mark's clients ever make images or if he does?

Caspar Walsh

Casper spoke candidly about his life experiences and the work he now carries out with prisoners. The idea of asking dads who are in prison to record a story for their children is inspired, stories which are of rehabilitation and morality. It made me think of the importance of the child hearing dad's voice even though he was not actually with them. I found this profoundly affecting and remembered how my husband made up stories for our children which they loved. I found it so affecting because when they were children, nearly forty years ago, at that time I felt really self-conscious reading to them because I'm dyslexic. Somehow this also stopped me from making up stories for them as well. I thought about the importance of Dad's telling stories to their children having heard about Caspar's relationship with his father. I wondered if his father told him stories? Wondering what stories he told him. Does Casper have any recordings of his father's voice, and it would have helped Casper if he had?

Pauline Mc Gee

There was so much that I could identify with and admire within Pauline's talk. It made me think about my own practice as an art therapist and the role art making plays. Pauline spoke about how the images she creates reflect her personal history and yet is often linked/stimulated by those she is working with. I was in particular struck by the fact that the only time she had found it impossible to make art for a while was when she was working with children caught up in the Dunblain tragedy. She spoke of how she re-started art making by using collage – saying that she re-started image making by 'picking up the pieces' – what an adapt description. This in turn led me to think about why in the past few years apart from a designated period of time each year I don't make art, yet when I worked in a hospice I made portraits of the people who I worked with. Not a particular likeness, but images concerning their external and internal selves as homage to the life they had lived, and as a way of remembering them. I've thought a lot about none art making and what relevance this has. I've come to the conclusion that I don't make images about the people

I see because this is a means of protecting my inner self, a way of keeping my home life separate from my work life. What do I do to be creative? – garden!