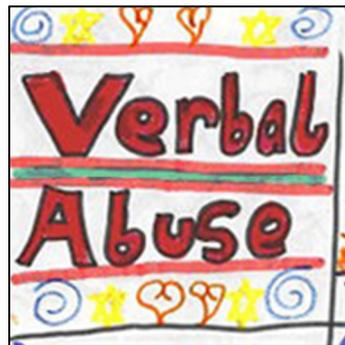




SHOW & TELL

TIFFANY CARE



'About Bullying' by Tiffany Care, Art Psychotherapist



When I planned to make a DVD 'About Bullying' with a group of young people at a local school, I had no idea it would have such an effect on my own life or practice as an Art Psychotherapist, let alone a role in influencing educational curricula or CAMHS training in North Wales. Completing the project has signalled a departure for me from the benign image of the non-directive therapist I was taught to be. This has involved challenging two notions that I think are widely held in our profession: that - for the most part - we constitute

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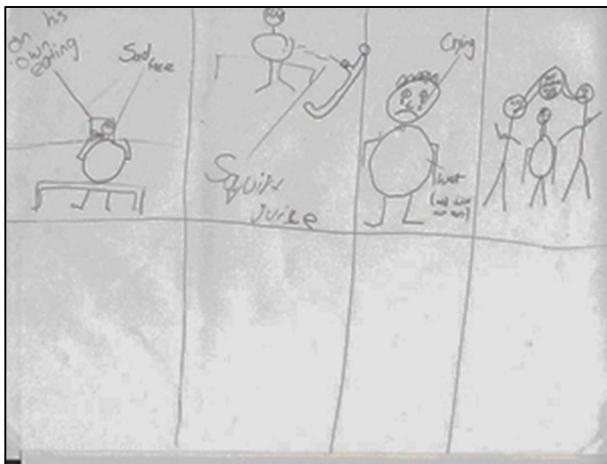
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vessels in which things can be held, and that acting directly constitutes an invasion of the client's space.

The DVD project represents an exploration of the idea that people often benefit from a little 'skills training', and that a 'blank sheet' can be experienced as withholding. I remember my personal therapist introduced me to this idea as a Trainee Art Psychotherapist. More recently I have come to value the Webster Stratton parenting groups run by the team at the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service where I work. I reasoned that if parenting skills are not innate, then many other abilities may also need to be acquired. Dialectical Behavioural Therapy training was useful in articulating this idea further, and in terms of art therapy literature, the workshop Articulating Art Therapy, designed by Malcolm Learmonth has been really useful. It helped me see that when applied sensitively, setting a task can be extremely facilitating and is one of the simplest ways to give permission in a creative context.

A primary aim of the film is to model useful alternative behaviours and responses. I was particularly keen to demonstrate the importance of maintaining positive expectations of young people in resolving the problem of bullying. The use of punishments or social exclusion is popular, but not effective in achieving this since it models aggressive behaviour as a problem solving strategy. Yet this is the very behaviour young people are being asked to change in the context of bullying.



The DVD planning group had an average attendance of 15 young people from years seven, eight, and nine, all of whom liked having a protected space at lunchtimes. The young people formulated boundaries and we agreed that they would take responsibility for keeping rules. They decided my job would be to apply consequences and make decisions as a result of rule breaking. There were difficult dynamics and boundary testing in the group from the start and I had to work very hard to model the desired behaviours and practice what I preached. I learned a lot about how much the young people could be expected to use their own initiative in keeping rules, and how much I needed to use the authority they had given me.

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One boy and his friend were really rowdy and called each other names. I tried several behavioural strategies, such as rewarding those behaving well through giving positive attention, and ignoring negative behaviours, but in the end I asked one of the boys to sit separately from his friend or think of alternative solutions to the problem. He seemed glad that I had made the suggestion and surprised me by willingly sitting by himself. He worked really hard subsequently and I made an effort to notice and praise him as often as possible. He came up with some really useful material and was a valuable member of the group, which felt like such a turnaround. In the end he gave me a little picture of a parrot and I always kept it on my desk.



An Art Therapy training generally places a strong emphasis on non-directive, well bounded approaches, and there is a huge value in this as it enables people to explore and make their own choices. But in reflecting on the project I have asked myself questions like: when are boundaries strong enough and how do we know? When do boundaries cross the line and become instructions or directions?

I have come to believe that some people, in some contexts, need more help to achieve their aims than I was trained to give them. I think that as Art Psychotherapists we could actually help some of our clients and ourselves more at times by trusting our experience, speaking out, and offering suggestions. The art is in knowing how and when to do this. Being able to articulate why is of key importance here, and something that I am currently exploring in the context of a creative, Solution Focussed approach.

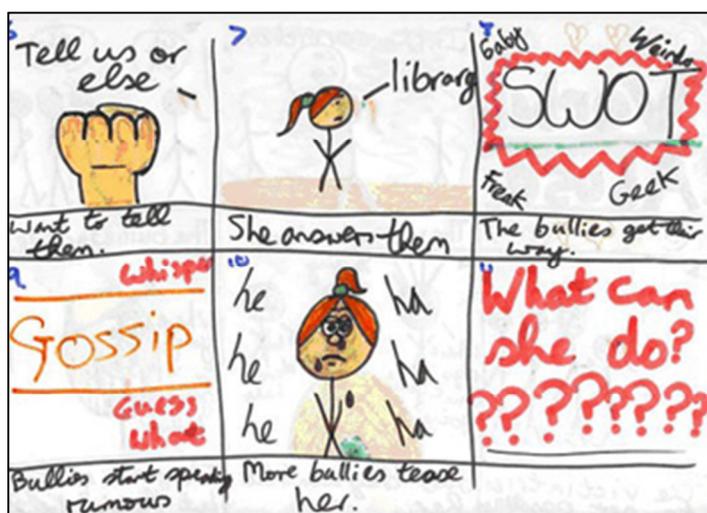
The processes of intervening and not, being directive and not, are both essentially about power being used (and abused), and the balance between being too directive and not directive enough is a fine one. A parallel bullying dynamic potentially exists in that an ill-judged intervention can be experienced as invasive or oppressive.

There are good reasons not to intervene. Anxiety is innate in creative processes and change, and as facilitators we must work with this consciously. Many inexperienced practitioners struggle to contain their own anxieties and then intervene intrusively (and powerfully). On the other hand, not intervening and being non-directive can be experienced as 'withholding' and equally powerful.

The DVD project has left me wondering how I ended up being rather passive in my practice. A contributory factor would be that as practitioners working in organisations, Art Therapists are usually placed in the context of a reactive, not proactive system. Our role is to help sort things out when they have gone 'wrong'. In formulating a basis for working with the anxiety, distress, and uncertainty our clients present, our profession often refers to the idea of the 'good enough' container, which comes from Jungian and Winnicottian theory.



The victim tries to get past them. But they won't let her. They ask questions but the girl doesn't



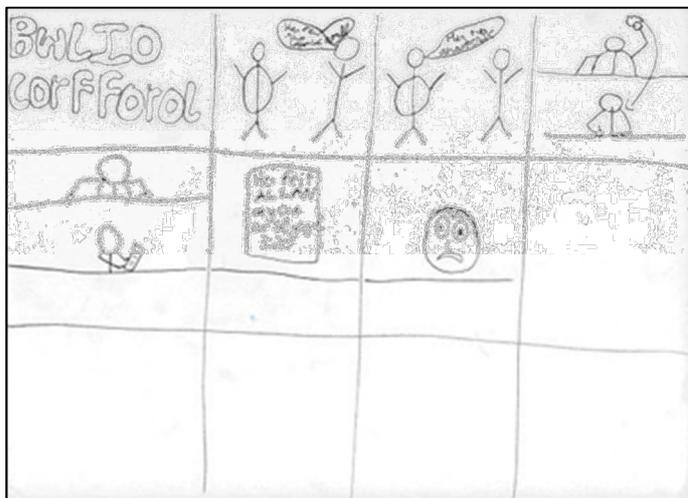
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influence people. It seems that sometimes this is the more helpful thing to do, because too much choice and/ or responsibility can be overwhelming.



The first time we managed to put together the 'stairs scene' and ran through it from beginning to end I realised that although the material came from the young people, because I had written and directed it, it was about me also. (In this the whole process replicates the therapeutic relationship, which I see as involving a meeting of two people.) The scene involves the whole cast and depicts a group confrontation. It was incredibly, breathtakingly powerful to see it acted out by a cast of 12 right in front of me. I remember with clarity the power of watching the story unfold in that way. I felt incredibly privileged to have been paid to work on such a project.



The last day of filming the stairs scene was a nightmare. The young people agreed to give up a day of their summer holidays so as to finish this and other scenes. There was no more time and whatever happened it would have to be good enough. There was lots of anxious giggling and we had to shoot over and over again because there would always be giggling at the crucial minute. The pressure of time was killing me and I had to tell them not to make eye contact with one another because it made the giggling worse. In the end my co-worker (who used to work in the army) lost her temper and shouted at them to behave and to listen to me. There had never been shouting in the group before. It made all of us jump and then stop dead, but after that we were able to get on and finish the work.

It's taken me a long time to think about what else could have been done to save the situation and I think advance planning is the key. At the time I was flat out and desperate, and if my colleague hadn't shouted we wouldn't have finished in time. It could be said that the shouting was strategic, it created a boundary, and was not fear inducing or bullying. But I still feel uncomfortable about it as there are other ways of providing effective discipline. Whilst there are contexts where being directive is appropriate the way in which those instructions and directions are given remains critical. The group did tell me (kindly) that I was 'too soft' on several previous occasions, but I would now like to ask them what they thought about the shouting.

The young people had strong, mixed reactions to seeing themselves on film and when it came to showing it to school staff I became very anxious myself. It felt like showing my personal art work. There were lots of worries about being judged. In fact all the anxieties about making and showing art work surfaced at this point. An art therapy training is extremely thorough in identifying these kinds of issues and in ways of working to minimise, if not avoid them. I know our profession is often seen as rather precious about our attitudes to artwork. Yet we protect our clients when we keep their work safe from view and it is that safety which allows the work to be made. In seeing the film the powerful reality of what had been explored was visible for all to see and the young people feared being bullied as a result (Images and text © Tiffany Care 200)

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of it. It was therefore agreed to show the film only to Year 7 children at least until the cast has left school.

I think the original impetus for boldly promoting the film came from the realisation that there are lots of successful people and products out there with no real talent or substance. Many celebrities are only recognised because they have the confidence and audacity to promote themselves and what they do. I wanted to raise the profile of the arts in education and children's services and demonstrate that creative techniques can really make a difference. The film was something worthwhile, important and meaningful. I reasoned that if a meaningful product could be promoted with confidence then there was a very good chance it would be positively received.

Presenting the work had to be thought through very carefully. In art psychotherapy what we do with the artwork after making is a highly significant part of the process, whether this is may be in the form of disposal or sharing. In going through the process of sharing I feel like I have 'come out' from behind my rock. Art Therapists often work in an isolated way and are not used to doing this. Now I have started showing myself and my skills the potential of the work has been more fully recognised and the impact and benefits maximised.

I think I had professionally taken on the role of victim and been afraid of being discredited, being different, and being the one with the art. I have since come to value and believe more in the art as a unique, visible and marketable product that can be shared. My experience following the film is that the more we share, the more people can see what we do and the quality of our work. They are more inclined to ask for our help as experts rather than the contrary. If we believe in what we do then we stand a better chance of leading change rather than reacting to it.



The project is going from strength to strength and Anglesey County Council Education Department have suggested that it should form a key part of their anti-bullying strategy. I

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have been asked to provide creative skills training workshops for School Governors, the secondary schools Inclusion Group, and at a national CAMHS Participation conference. The Regional CAMHS Commissioning Network Training Panel and the local Specialist CAMHS manager have seen the potential of the project to positively influence emotional health of young people in the area.

My hope is that the DVD will form a core part of CAMHS training provision throughout the region. Art Therapists have much to offer in terms of providing creative skills training to enable practitioners in developing competencies in arts processes/ practice. After all, as we say, this is the natural language for children and young people and practitioners need to speak this language if they are to successfully engage young people.

In writing about the project I have been able to understand and reflect on my experience, and to find more meaning in it, which was an important process for my personal and professional growth. I am certainly not an academic writer but I was pleasantly surprised to find how much I had to say when I got going. The feelings about the writing have mirrored those that I experienced during the process of making the film, in that it feels raw and revealing to show and tell. However, I think creativity often arises from tension, and I hope that this testimony will inspire others to find the resources they need, take their courage in their hands, and show their colours.

Tiffany Care

Since completing this work Tiffany has given a presentation at a national CAMHS conference about the DVD and her handbook submission is now on-line at <http://www.csip.org.uk/silo/files/york-conference-handbook.pdf> (see page 23, Working in Partnership: Creative Competencies in CAMHS workshop no. 7)

Note: Still images from the DVD which show some of the young people who participated in the project have been deliberately obscured.

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