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"Story and Storytelling in Storytelling Therapy
and Expressive Arts Therapy"

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Abstract: This paper presents theory about, and examples of, ways story and storytelling have been and could be used in Storytelling Therapy, and also in Expressive Arts Therapy (which involves the holistic combined use of any of the arts). Also discussed are ways story can be used in all of the Expressive Therapies (of which Expressive Arts Therapy is one).

Excerpt:

A therapist can lead a client through the *Six-part Story-method* (6PSM), or some other similar story-making method.

Mooli Lahad, who coined the term, Six-part Story-method, and has written about it, is a psychologist who is interested in people's psychological methods and styles of coping, being resilient, handling stress, and surviving.

Lahad refers to a client's story-composing ability as an aspect of *Bibliotherapy* (*Book Therapy*), and as an assessment tool.

The 6PSM involves the therapist inviting the client to draw a story in six episodes. The client is asked to originally draw the episodes, rather than to speak or write them, because the unconscious can communicate through drawing at times. The client is encouraged to draw simply, with stick figures. After the story is drawn, the client is requested to tell and explain the story, and answer questions about it.

To lead clients through the 6PSM, the therapist says: Please draw one horizontal line, and two vertical lines. Then:

- 1) *In the upper-left rectangular area*, draw a character / a hero/heroine.
- 2) *In the upper-center rectangular area*, draw to represent the task/mission/goal(s) of the character.
- 3) *In the upper-right rectangular area*, draw to represent the kinds of support/ resources your character has that he/she could call upon while seeking to achieve his/her task/mission/goal(s).
- 4) *In the lower-left rectangular area*, draw to represent obstacles that might stand in the way of the character achieving his/her task/mission/goal(s).
- 5) *In the lower-center rectangular area*, draw to represent ways the character might cope with and overcome the obstacles.
- 6) *In the lower-right rectangular area*, draw to represent how the story ends.

The therapist should seek to understand the dominant coping modes of the story's main character. It is along these lines that the therapist could then approach the client regarding obstacles and ways of handling them in the client's 'real' life.

Lahad proposes that the story a client creates demonstrates the way the client habitually perceives and reacts to the world, and that this kind of communication by metaphor is useful in psychotherapy.

He assumes that by composing a projected story based on the structure of fairytales and myth, a client would communicate the way his/her self sees itself. He claims that Marie-Louise von Franz, the interpreter of fairytales from a Jungian perspective, has found that these six elements are always represented in fairytales (von Franz, 1987) (Lahad, No date).

The 6PSM technique is commonly taught as part of training in Drama Therapy in the UK and is increasingly included in training for Clinical Psychologists and *Cognitive Analytic Therapy* practitioners in general.

A limitation of this method is that it depends to some degree on a client's conscious decisions regarding what stories to tell and what not to tell. A client's conscious decisions could communicate more about what a client wants to say about his/her condition, as opposed to what that condition actually is.

According to Kim Dent-Brown, the 6PSM idea was devised in the 1980s by Alida Gersie, an Anglo-Dutch Drama Therapist who had been inspired by the writings of Vladimir Propp and Algirdas Greimas:

Alida Gersie had the idea of taking the fundamental story structure proposed by Greimas and of using it as a skeleton onto which new stories could be created. She taught this story technique to Mooli Lahad, an Israeli psychologist who developed it into the 6PSM. Lahad published about it and taught it internationally. (Dent-Brown, 2011)

Regardless of the details of how 6PSM was formulated, it should be kept in mind that the method involves a variant of a model that is the product of one hundred years of thinking by Anthropologists, Folklorists, and Literary scholars regarding the archetypal story of the hero/heroine. Milestones in this field include:

1894 -- *The Golden Bough*, by Sir James Frazer, Scottish Social Anthropologist.

1909 -- *Myth of the Birth of the Hero: A Psychological Interpretation of Mythology*, by Otto Rank, Austrian Psychoanalyst. Originally published in the German language.

1928 -- *The Morphology of The Folktale*, by Vladimir Propp, Soviet Folklorist and Structuralist. Originally published in the Russian language.

1937 -- *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama*, by Lord Raglan, British Anthropologist.

1949 -- *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, by Joseph Campbell, USA Mythologist.

Each of these thinkers had a different approach to the hero's story, and stressed a different aspect of it.

One theme Frazer focused on was the need for the young hero to overthrow the old king, and so renew the kingdom and the cosmos in a cyclical manner.

Rank is known as classical Freudian: his hero's conflicts with his father dominate the story.

Propp saw a story composed of 32 *functions*, which can be reduced to a three-part structure: 1) There is a peaceful and happy home, 2) The home is broken-up by an external villain; and 3) A hero from the shattered home defeats the villain and helps to re-formulate a new home.

Raglan developed a 22-step mythic-ritualist hero archetype culminating in the hero achieving a realisation (an apotheosis, a revelation) about himself and the cosmos.

Joseph Campbell saw this three-part structure: 1) The hero's community is oppressed, dull, and lifeless (for examples: people are unable to have children, and there is no rain); 2) The hero goes on a journey and obtains a sacred object; and 3) The hero returns to the community with the sacred object which he uses to revitalise the community.

In a number of these formulations, the hero/heroine facing and coping with obstacles plays a major role. Lahad focused on this aspect because he was interested in measuring people's coping mechanisms. However, some of these thinkers focused on other aspects of the story, such as the hero's fear of the unknown and refusal of the call to adventure; the hero's level of curiosity and love of adventure; the hero's desire to align him/herself with the power of the cosmos and then (with the help of a sacred item) liberate his/her people from oppression, etc. This is to say that a therapist need not limit his/her clients to Lahad's approach when inviting clients to compose stories.

In addition, one may at times want to omit mention that the character should be a hero or heroine. The hero term is loaded with implications that the character needs to do great things, for him/herself and his/her community. Cultural and religious ideals can also be conjured by the term, hero. A therapist may at times prefer to omit these possible implications, and simply invite the client to compose a story around "a character" of the client's choice.

Campbell's vision of story has been very influential in the world of cinema. Due in part to his influence, it is almost gospel that a Hollywood commercial movie should center around a hero/heroine who has a mission. This story-composition method has been widely taught to Hollywood screenplay writers since at least the early-1980s (McKee, 1997).

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Eric's Story-composition Method

Choose and draw a character. This character can be you. It can be an aspect of you. It can be based on some other person or character. It can also be a purely imaginary character.

Draw the character's hair and clothing. Is the character holding anything? Is anything next to the character? Might any animals be present? Where is the character? In what environment is the character? What expression is on her face? What is her posture? Is she posed in any particular way? Does the character seem to have any special abilities, powers, areas of expertise (for example, can the character understand the language of a particular type of animal?) How does the character feel? If the character might be feeling any particular emotion -- imagine why the character might be feeling that way. What might have happened that has led to the character feeling this way?

Has the character recently come from somewhere? If yes -- Why did the character go there? Did the character get something, do something, or meet someone there?

Does the character want anything? Has the character lost anything? Is the character seeking anything? Does the character want to go anywhere? Want to do anything? Make anything? Meet anyone?

If the answer to any of these questions is "Yes" -- What happened, and/or might happen, along the way? What adventures, twists and turns, advances and setbacks, helpers (teachers, friends, etc) and enemies, obstacles and solutions, etc, might occur? What happens at the end of the story?