

The Rhythms of Loss and Remembrance

Morgan Libeau

ABSTRACT

The death of a parent can be a difficult, significant and life-impacting event. Without adult support and guidance, grieving and development may be impeded. This research utilises a Creative Arts intervention in a single case study to address the mourning tasks of an adolescent girl. The modalities of rhythm, drumming, and poetic language in the form of songwriting, facilitate the exploration of feelings, while enabling expression and movement around the mourning tasks. Positive gains for the adolescent were evidenced through the results of questionnaires, a grief process scale, and thematic analysis of client-composed songs. Improvement of the pre-intervention symptoms was indicated. The findings offer preliminary support for the use of this particular Arts Therapy modality with a bereaved child.

Songs weave tales of our joys and sorrows, they reveal our innermost secrets, and they express our hopes and disappointments, our fears and triumphs. They are our musical diaries, our life stories. They are the sounds of our personal development (Bruscia, 2005).

INTRODUCTION

This is the story of a bereaved young adolescent girl, aged 14, who had lost her mother in tragic circumstances. Subsequent estrangements and separations compounded an initial loss that echoed and reverberated through the corridors of her heart.

What follows is the retelling of a series of synchronistic events that led me, as a trainee Art Therapist, to a sad and grieving girl with a love of music, and to a beautiful and profoundly lush landscape which we harvested together.

The rhythms and music of this journey were to shape us both: the Participant in her search for some sense and acceptance of her loss, and me, the Therapist, in the exploration of a modality of therapy that had moved and inspired me.

Most of my career has been in child-centred work as a forensic interviewer with abused

children. I have also interviewed children who have experienced a traumatic and sudden loss through the death of a parent or sibling. Exposure to these children and their families created a strong desire to pursue and develop further work in this area. While undertaking my studies at Whitecliffe College of Arts and Design, I was introduced to hand drumming as a creative modality. Then, while researching for an assignment, I came across the work of Tom Dalton, an American Music Therapist, who was using drumming and song writing with bereaved children. I was deeply moved by the account of his work. Poetic language and poetry had always been a particular and personal passion of mine, and my own experiences with death and bereavement were undoubtedly both conscious and unconscious factors in my following this path. My chosen research enabled the marriage of all three: drumming, poetic language and bereavement.