

The Creativity of Mastery in Therapy and Education

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I am a yellow dinosaur with a feather to one young girl; she is a crocodile who needs a weekly shot to cure her meanness. An older child may liken his rage to that of a fire. At times this fire is swelling with fury and at other times he is able to find the water to smother the flames.

The creativity of play and use of metaphor in healing are powerful therapeutic tools for both children and adults. Through these means the individual is able to externalize pieces of herself that are incongruent with social demands and values. In an unthreatening manner, she is able to feel rage and to master inner conflicts through projection onto a stuffed animal or a fire. Play and metaphors allow children and adults to externalize their pain in a manner which allows greater introspection and scrutiny, and which subsequently leads to mastery of emotions. The young girl processes and masters the daily medicine she is given to decrease her rageful behaviors through the above play scenario while the young boy is able to externalize his rage and understand the control he holds over his feelings through metaphor.

Similarly, students master concepts in educational settings most effectively through creative approaches that foster construction of personal meaning. While completing my diagnostic practicum at a suburban middle school, I spent numerous hours observing students within the classroom setting. I unknowingly developed criteria for effective and less effective teaching styles through this experience. I remember one teacher who taught her students English concepts via rhymes. Students standing on the seat of their chairs and chanting definitions was a common sight. This activity was a game, learning was fun, and the students were engaged. Although I did not come to know the students' test scores, I saw the students' smiles and heard their words.

Creativity allows the learner, whether in therapy or in education, to personalize the information; creativity allows the learner to let the material become one with their being, to incorporate it into the self. Otherwise my small faded yellow dinosaur puppet would be just that, a puppet. It is through this process that individuals reach mastery.