

Using the Emotional Learning Cards – a Dramatherapist’s Perspective

PROFILE

My name is Jodie Cariss and I am a Sesame-trained drama and movement therapist. I work predominantly in educational settings, but also have a private practice, run process groups for adults and consult to corporate businesses working with young people.

I have worked as a therapist in education for over 10 years. My practice includes providing therapeutic services for children, adolescents and school staff; consulting on behaviour management; providing creative enrichment and designing bespoke therapeutic interventions in schools.

I also have a company which provides schools and colleges with therapists and a range of creative enrichment tutors and packages which I believe support the school and pupils to access the right provision for growth.

My main focus has always been on the well being of young people especially the importance of being seen and heard as well as having a safe place to explore life experiences through creative activities and the use of metaphor.

As a consultant therapist, I have undertaken commissioned work with **A Space** using the emotional learning cards. Key approaches I have found helpful are summarised below.

THEME 1: Exploring Past, Present & Future

The Emotional Learning Cards (ELC's) can be used to support the client in exploring shifting relationships to their past, present and future. The therapist can reflect, observe and make links through using metaphor and developing the storylines created by the client in response to selected cards.

This type of exercise allows a narrative to unfold that can be factual and personal, highlighting key events from the client's life. Feelings and experiences can be unpacked, amplified and dramatised in the moment or by revisiting the cards at opportune times.

The client's growth is facilitated through the discovery of new perspectives on past events or new ways of relating. Clients can work every week with one timeframe or explore links and connections between all three. There are many ways this approach can be useful and meaningful.

Suggestions to support the exploration of past, present & future

- Lay out the cards or encourage the client to look through them choosing a card or cards to represent past, present and future.
- Place the cards on the table and ask the client to share why they have chosen each card.

You may want to open up the exploration by asking:

- What do you notice about the cards you've selected?
- How do you feel when you look at the cards?
- What comfortable or uncomfortable feeling states do you associate with each card? (Have a selection of words to choose from or ask the client to create their own.)
- Arrange the words relating to each card in a way that makes sense to you. What do you notice?
- If you could change anything about these images what would it be? Perhaps you might take away or
- add something? If so, what would that be?
- Where might you position yourself in these images?
- What might have happened before or after the moment captured in each of the images?

Bringing in a drama therapy task:

- Ask your client to create dialogue for characters in the images and/or those not included in the picture. Then 'freeze frame' this or act this out.
- If you are working in a group, pairs can 'sculpt' each other by creating poses that reflect an aspect of each image. The client could either direct the 'sculpting' or be in the drama.

THEME 2: This is me

This exercise can be used for both 1 to 1 work and in groups.

- Working in pairs, take it in turns to draw around each other. In individual sessions, if the client is comfortable, the therapist can offer to trace around the client or the client can draw an outline of a figure to represent themselves.
- Once the outline is complete and time has been taken to look and comment on it, the client can then begin to fill in the outline using drawings, other craft /collage materials and photocopies of the ELC cards which can be used as complete images or cut up.
- This might take several sessions and the work can be returned to and developed over time.

Exploring 'self' & 'other' – suggested ways to open up the conversation with your client:

Therapist:

- You have in the past mentioned feeling anxious. Where do you feel anxiety? What image might represent this? Place or stick the image onto your outline.
- Where do you contain / feel loss? Hope? Confidence? etc What image might symbolise this? Does it have a place in your outline?
- You have been sharing much about your family. Perhaps you carry them in mind. Which images might represent them or the roles they play in your life? Where might you place these?
- Perhaps there are some images that represent how you think others see you. Place these somewhere inside or outside the outline to convey whether or not these perceptions reflect how you see yourself. Are there images which capture this? Describe how you feel about how you are seen by others. What images might you choose for this and where would they be placed? What do you notice? Is there anything you would like to change about how you are perceived?

THEME 3: My World

This exercise allows clients to share and explore their lives through using metaphors embedded in the ELC images.

Suggestions to support meaning-making:

- Choose a card to represent yourself. Place it on the floor or table.
- Choose cards to represent significant others in your life. Place those in relationship to the card representing you.
- Choose cards to represent other aspects of your life (eg. home, school, work, hobbies or other areas of life you'd like to include).
- What do you notice? What do you feel about what you see? Are there aspects you would like to change? Any areas you are happy with? etc
- Add words if you want to.

Bring in a creative therapy task:

- Ask your client to focus on key aspects of their world and create a story, a drama or a piece of art around these themes.
- Revisit the layout of the cards and move them around as the story unfolds, reflecting aspects of life that change or remain the same.

CONCLUSION

All three sets of the ELC's support creative exploration in individual or group therapy sessions. There is no right or wrong way to use the cards – hopefully the images and commentary on the cards will inspire you to develop your own ideas!

What did you think of this resource? We want to hear from you...

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About Iniva Creative Learning

Iniva Creative Learning is a not-for-profit partnership between [A Space](#) (arts and therapy service, Hackney) and [Iniva](#) (the Institute of International Visual Arts). We share a commitment to producing art-based resources and delivering initiatives which promote emotional learning, personal development and psychological growth.

Emotional Learning Cards

It is now widely recognised that well-being in every part of life depends on successfully building understanding, insight and emotional resilience. **A Space** and **Iniva** have been co-publishing **Emotional Learning Cards since 2008** and they now occupy a leading position in the growing fields of **emotional learning and psychological therapies**.

Each boxed set of Emotional Learning Cards includes 20 cards:

- **On the front:** visually rich images of a contemporary artwork by a variety of culturally diverse and emerging artists known for their engagement in social or political enquiry.
- **On the back:** open questions and discussion prompts around the theme 'What do you feel?', 'Who are you? Where are you going?' and 'How do we live well with others?' for group or one-to-one use.

Suggestions for using the cards in different contexts such as school, home, gallery workshops and individual or group therapy settings are offered in a **fold-out leaflet**.