



Imagine That: Postmodern Redecision Methods that use Imagination

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Abstract

This article presents two stories of rededecision therapy that use the client's imagination and imagery as resources for change. It presents a rationale for using imagery and imagination with greater awareness as therapeutic interventions, for both uncovering unconscious script patterns and inviting change. Techniques of rededecision therapy that use imagery have been looked at through a constructivist lens, with the hope that the use of these techniques can gain prominence in contemporary practice.

Key Words

Story, Imagination, Imagery, Rededecision, Narrative, Constructivist, Transactional Analysis, Early Scene Work

Stories and Redecisions

We are all storytellers. We are the stories we tell.

In our own practice, we are contactfully involved in the stories that our clients share. What stories are they choosing to tell? What are they telling themselves about themselves, others and life? How do the stories they tell impact them? Do the stories allow them to enjoy the unfolding process of life in a lively and flexible manner or do they keep them stuck by not allowing new emotions or information in? We look for meaning within each story and also for themes across stories.

When we are applying rededecision therapy (Goulding and Goulding, 1979/1997; Allen and Allen, 1995, 1997; McNeel, 2010) we are curious about the origins of some of our clients' stories. Using feelings as a reference point to search for stories from a client's childhood, we explore how the child's autonomous expression was invalidated. We are curious about how the child made meaning of the experience and what decisions they made in response. We then use experiential methods to work with the story, trusting clients to make choices for themselves.

We believe within our approach that clients need to have a new emotional experience for them to have a new cognitive framework, so the methods are designed to arouse and intensify emotions. As clients work phenomenologically, new insight, meaning, emotions, sensations and imagery are activated through the interventions. This new experience is integrated into the self.

Traditional rededecision therapy was conceived by Goulding and Goulding as a therapy process that helps the client make a new decision. In contrast, postmodern rededecision therapy, as described by Allen and Allen, is seen as a therapy process that helps the client gain a new story.

Allen and Allen (1995) describe rededecision therapy as a narrative, constructivist process. Within constructivism, we are not regarded as passive recipients of information but as active constructors of knowledge, based on our experience. As we experience the world, we make meaning of what happens to us. We build our own representations of the world in our minds. "What we make of experience constitutes the only world we live in." (Glaserfeld, 2003, p.1). Clients share their worlds with us through their stories. This narrative truth is what we attend to as therapists. We are less concerned with verifying the accuracy of the client's story and more concerned with their meaning-making. We are curious about how clients have constructed their thoughts and feelings in order to fit into the world as they experienced it.

So while the methods used in rededecision therapy may be the same, how we conceptualise the process is different in both these approaches. The traditional rededecision therapist will think in terms of injunctions, decisions, structural analysis and impasse resolution. The postmodern therapist will focus on the client's choosing a new story or giving new meaning to an old story; Allen and Allen conceive of the process as "coconstructing a new past" (Allen

and Allen, 1997, p.93). Naming the decision and heightening the discomfort around the same is not seen as a necessary step to the transformation of the narrative. Gentle, non-directive, playful and imaginative processes work well. The redecision has a “more incremental nature over time, notwithstanding the occasional dramatic moment of insight or catharsis.” (Mcneel, 2018, p. 65) Consistent, incremental therapeutic gains are seen as valuable. Achieving rapid change is not a prioritised goal. In the relationship, through dialogue, the new story may gradually come to the foreground over several sessions. The old story recedes into the background and gradually fades away.

The role of imagination and imagery

The construct of narrative truth challenges the idea that there is one truth and opens us up to the possibility of many truths. Allen and Allen (1995), when writing about narrative theory, say, “Each person is entitled to more than one story” (p. 329). Because this approach to therapy is possibility-focused, imagination plays a crucial role. Imagination is the human capacity to envision that which has not been experienced. Imagination is a form of magical thinking. So the goal of therapy becomes not to challenge magical thinking but to harness it, to aid the client’s active participation in their own growth.

If imagination is the capacity to envision, imagery is the product of this capacity. We concretise our inner world, giving it form and shape. Ronen (2011) understands imagery as using all the senses in the construction of a mental picture. We think of them as a whole experience unto themselves - what we see, what we sense (hear, touch, smell, taste), how we feel and how we understand and make meaning. Images also contain representations of our unconscious that include fantasies and influences from our culture. Imagery is thus an immensely rich source of information, a construction that is composed of sensory, emotional, cognitive, historical and cultural information. (Lang, 1977; Gladfelter, 1995; Ronen, 2011).

Arntz, de Groot and Kindt (2005) state that if a person is remembering something that is highly emotional, it is likely to be in the form of an image. Holmes, Arntz and Smucker (2007) say that the converse is also true and that it means imagery has a powerful impact on emotions, more than the verbal processing of the same material. Because imagery gives us a sense of ‘being-there’, it is likelier for the person to experience affect. (Arbuthnott, and Arbuthnott, 1987). Imagery enables the focus to shift from overdetailed explanations to experiencing in the moment. Thus imagery offers a way to bypass the verbal barrier and can be used very effectively with

clients who get stuck with intellectualising their experience.

Redecision work using imagination and imagery

Images can be summoned from memory or created through fantasy. Both are constructions in the present. (Ronen, 2011). This means we construct both our image and our experience of it. Our images are not factual representations of our experiences, but are imbued with meaning that fits our larger frame of reference. The premise of work with an early scene is that these images can be reconstructed in therapeutic interventions. Smucker (1997) observed that distress in trauma-related memories is embedded in the imagery itself, and recommends modifying the imagery as a potent way of dealing with the trauma.

In redecision work using imagination and imagery, a new story is invited by changing the imagery in the story. Early scene work can be conceptualised as a form of mental time travel in which clients visualise a key scene from their past and narrate the story as though it were happening in the present. It is typically a scene where the child’s autonomous expressions were invalidated in some way. Revisiting the scene gives the client an opportunity to contact inner truths about themselves in relation to others in that situation and re-experience the emotions in the present. The goal is to identify how the child made meaning of the earlier experience and at what point gave up its autonomy.

Imagination is then used to transform the story in a manner that the client feels supported to stay autonomous. The transformation can be achieved by the addition of a new element into the image that has the power to counter a powerful limitation of an existing image or by the transformation of any oppressive element in the image into a less toxic one. Images become the canvas for the therapist and client to paint newer stories on. In the process of playful exploration, the client discovers, often surprisingly, that they have the capacity to reimagine and change a story. While the injunctive messages received by the client are not eliminated, they learn to respond differently to them. (McNeel, 2018)

This process allows the client to “construct a new representation of the original memory that challenges its original meaning, and will hopefully be preferentially recalled over the toxic one.” (Wheatley and Hackmann, 2011, p.445). Brewin (2006) suggests that “there are multiple memories involving the self that compete to be retrieved” (p.765) and that the task of therapy is to help the positive representations win the retrieval competition. “If these new representations are memorable and

meaningful, then they may be strong enough to compete with the original representation that had been stored with all its negative meanings.” (Wheatley and Hackmann, 2011, p. 445)

In this paper, we highlight two specific techniques for leading the client to a new story by imaginatively transforming imagery.

Redecision work by bringing in a Magical Supporter

I (first author) experienced this technique first in a two-day rededecision therapy workshop by Ian Stewart at The Berne, UK, in 2019. I was fascinated by the impact it had on clients, both in the workshop and in my use of this with clients subsequently. However, we found no written material around this method and therefore decided to showcase its potency by conceptualising it and presenting an example of its use.

We can conceive of the Magical Supporter as a metaphor for the parent figure that was missing in the key early scene, who offers the child the permission to choose autonomous behaviour. The Magical Supporter could be a person (real or imaginary, alive or dead), animal or higher being that a client chooses. Because the supporter is magical, they can intuit and unconditionally offer what the child needs in the moment.

The introduction of a Magical Supporter can be seen as the application of the self-reparenting technique (James, 1974). Muriel James wrote, “Imaginary characters in novels and dramas often have real power in a person’s life.” (p.37). She says the process that the person uses to create a New Parent ego state is similar to that of a creative writer, drawing ideas from many sources. Thus clients through their imagination and active work design their own combinations of parent figures. “The New Parent will have positive qualities, planned by the Adult to balance the negative qualities incorporated from their historical parents.” (p.34). “The New Parent does not replace the old parents, but it does change the Parent ego state.” (p.36).

McNeel (2018) says, “If an injunctive message exists, you will find an earlier parental voice that is somehow in collusion with that message. People need to have voices inside them that contain compassion, wisdom and love.” (p.66). He refers to these new protective voices as the “new parental stance that heals”.

The Magical Supporter is a way to elicit these new protective voices that offer feelings of warmth and acceptance for the self. In response to the New Parent, the Child has a different experience. The use of an external supporter makes it easy for clients who

have a very high internalised Critical Parent, and find it difficult to nurture themselves. Bringing in a new, supportive Parent as a technique is particularly effective in Asian cultures, where the Cultural Parent requires people to be grateful to parents. Inviting clients to own their anger towards their Parents often invites resistance. This method allows the Parent(s) to stay who they are, and therefore makes it culturally acceptable. The imagery can be accessed repeatedly to evoke feelings of acceptance and safety, and offer permissions to self.

Introducing the magical supporter gives the reins to the client - the therapist is not suggesting what can change - the client participates and uses the information they now have to create another self with its own plot-line.

The story of Tia

A 43-year client of mine (first author) Tia was going through difficulty in her marriage and struggling with it alone. I was aware of Tia’s history. She was the second girl child. Some of the stories that her mother had shared with the two girls were “Even though both of you were girls, your father distributed sweets.”, implying that the father had demonstrated a largeness of heart uncharacteristic of men, and that they ought to be grateful that their existence was accepted. Tia would often use the words, “I don’t want to burden anyone with my troubles.” Indeed she believed her very existence was a burden to her parents, and easily slipped into anxiety. Identifying anxiety as the distressing feeling in the present, I asked Tia for the earliest memory of the same feeling. She said, “Almost every day. When papa came home from work.”

I invited Tia to close her eyes, relax, reimagine the scene, and share it in the first person as if it were happening in the present. My instructions were: Sit comfortably, close your eyes, take a deep breath. Focus on what is going on inside you. Imagine the scene as though it were happening right now. Can you see yourself? How old are you? Who else is there?

Tia said, “I am six years old. My sister, mum and I are playing carrom in the living room.”

“Tell me more about your living room,” I asked. “We have these lovely chairs with intricate cane weaving, and comfortable cushions. The room is airy. There are pictures of us on the wall and a large TV in front of us.” “What time is it?” I asked her. “It is six p.m. I have finished my homework, and am really looking forward to this playtime with my sister. My mum has made some grilled sandwiches for us.” “What sandwiches are they? Are they nice?” I asked her. “They are delicious cheese sandwiches, warm and crunchy,” she said smiling. My questions helped her

imagine what she had seen, heard, felt, smelt and tasted. It immersed her in the visualisation and reduced cognitive distractions. "What happens now?" I asked her. "After we play for about 30 min, we hear my father's car pull up. My mother's face turns anxious. "Time up for playing," she says hurriedly, "Pack up and go to your room and do something useful. Otherwise papa will be upset."

This is the point where her autonomy is negated. I invited her to describe her bodily experience, her thoughts and her feelings. "I am very scared and confused. My heart is pounding. I don't want to stop playing. But mum is very anxious. I go into my room. Papa comes in looking very sad. The air in the house feels heavy. We are all very quiet. I am very scared that I might say or do something that might trouble him. I peep into the living room and he is there, looking morose. I shut the door and stay quiet."

This story revealed to me Tia's meaning-making process. In order to remain okay with her parents and survive, she must not need things or express herself.

At this moment, I introduced Tia to the idea of a magical supporter. I asked Tia if she would be interested in reimagining the scene with her supporter and using her intuition to let it unfold with this new character in the story. Tia looked curious and interested. I told her that the magical supporter may be there from the beginning of the scene or may come in at any point that she thought was appropriate.

Tia took some time to make her decision. "I am thinking of James Bond," she said with a big smile on her face. Her energy shifted from the scared Child to the playful one. I was excited too by her choice and curious about how the process would unfold.

I asked her to retell the story. "James Bond is with us, playing carrom. He is on my team. We are winning. He does a high five with me as I strike a white piece into the pocket. Papa's car pulls in. Mama looks anxious and says, 'Time up for playing.'"

"What happens now?" I asked her.

"James Bond, looks at mama puzzled and says, "Why?!!" "He will be upset," mama says. James Bond looks at us and says, "He will be alright. We don't have to stop playing," using the striker with flair. He winks at me and gives me a thumbs up." Tia smiled as she narrated this. Her eyes were still closed.

"How do you feel?" I asked her. "I feel curious and nervous." "What happens now?" I asked her. "Papa comes in. We are all still there." "You are all still there," I emphasised the difference.

She nodded and continued, "James Bond looks at papa and smiles. Papa smiles a weak smile and settles into a chair. I look at James Bond and he tells me it is my turn. Mama goes into the kitchen to get papa some tea. My sister, James Bond and I continue to play. I see my father right next to us, sad and morose, drinking his tea and watching us play. I am not feeling heavy. I feel like asking him to join us, but I let him be. I can see the board in front of me and see the red queen. I get ready to pocket the queen."

Tia's redecision

Tia had a new story. By introducing James Bond into her story, she had found a way to offer herself the support and permissions she needed to be herself and not worry about being a burden to her parents. In the new narrative, Tia disentangled her feelings from her father's, and did not take on the responsibility for feeling his sadness for him. She had a new feeling.

The scene had a new outcome. She changed what she believed was possible for her. She redecided who she was in relation to her father.

James Bond's presence created a playfulness in her story. He was self-assured and full of flair, like Tia wished she were. It was almost as if James Bond snipped away the strings of obligation to be sad, small and quiet, with a flair of his scissors. The imagery in the new story is congruent with the new feelings and choices, as James Bond smiles on encouragingly and Tia gets ready to pocket the queen.

After this session, Tia decided to travel home to meet her parents. She shared with me later that she imagined James Bond came along too. At the dining table, she could see both her unsmiling father and next to him the smiling, encouraging James Bond giving her a Thumbs up. She said she had a constant smile on her face during the trip and the energy in the house did not feel morose or heavy. Hebb's (1949) famous law postulates that neurons that fire together, wire together. The imagery stayed with her and activated self-soothing emotions, strengthening her capacity for self-nurturing.

Tia shared with me that when she shared the news of her failing marriage with her father, he received the news without getting devastated and was "surprisingly supportive" of her decisions and choices. Change in meaning for one aspect of our story alters other aspects as well. James Bond's presence in the narrative anchored Tia's new-found view of herself as relaxed and confident. The image of the scary father changed to fit coherently with this new image of herself.

Redecision Work by Transforming the Ogre

The Ogre is a fearsome image of a Parent in P1: “magical, primitive, powerful and electrifying” (Steiner, 1979, p. 26). This image, while it originated externally, is constructed by the child. This part of our personality imposes crippling injunctions on us. To the child, defying the asks of this image implies doom.

A good metaphor for the ogre is the Boggart in the Harry Potter series. (Rowling, 1999) The Boggart is a non-being, which means it exists only in imagination. It has no shape of its own. When it meets a person it takes on the shape of what the person fears the most. The ogre too exists in a person’s imagination and symbolises what they fear the most.

The clue to dealing with the ogre lies in the spell that repels the Boggart. This is what Remus Lupin says while teaching students in his Defence Against the Dark Arts class, “You see, the thing that really finishes a Boggart is laughter. What you need to do is force it to assume a shape that you find amusing. After me, please ... Riddikulus!” If the spell caster is able to laugh, the boggart disappears. This story encapsulates a powerful psychotherapeutic principle – our fantasies create emotions and therefore an alternate fantasy can change the emotion. The alternate fantasy could help us recognise our earlier fantasy as a fantasy, and an absurd one at that.

In this technique, the power and impact of a terrifying P1 image is diminished by using imagination to transform the parent image. In the new imagery because the parent is not scary or intimidating, the child does not feel as vulnerable and reclaims its autonomy. It also makes the idea that injunctions are given by the Child ego state in the parental figure clearer to clients. The vulnerabilities and unfinished business of the parent come into the foreground. The toxic messages lose their potency.

The key is to transform the image into something that feels less threatening. Redecision therapy offers a creative license to both clients and practitioners. We could imagine the ogre with elephant ears or wearing a clown suit or having shiny, large white teeth. These challenge the automatic viewing of the parent as threatening, and embolden the client. Clients can gain a sense of control and confidence.

The story of Maya

Maya often offered lengthy explanations in therapy, going off on tangents and feeling confused about where she began. When we explored this pattern of hers, she contacted her belief, “I will never be understood”. As she discovered this, she got in touch with a heaviness in her chest, “I feel sad that nobody

was there for me as a child, to just listen and understand.”

I (first author) invited Maya to close her eyes and think of her earliest memory of the sadness and narrate it to me in the present tense. This was the full story that she narrated, with several encouraging prompts from me. “I am seven years old. I live in a colony with many blocks of apartments. Kids usually play around in the common areas. So, I go out to play around 6 p.m. I see no one outside to play, so I go to my friend’s house to ask if she would come out to play. She is in block 4, right next to mine. She invites me inside. I hesitate. I vaguely see a side view of my mum at our block, seeing me standing outside my friend’s house. But I am too excited to play, push all unnecessary thoughts, and focus on having a good time with my friend. We play till 8:00 pm losing track of time. Now that I have to go back home, I am filled with dread at being questioned. My body goes from being energetic to slumped. I know I will be reminded of everything that is wrong with me and how my behaviour is the doom of me.

I reach home and hurry into my room, heart thumping. I am in between my cupboard and bed. I am changing clothes. My mum comes and stands in front of me. The wall is behind, mum is in front, the bed and the cupboard are on either side. I feel trapped. She says, “Where were you all this while?” Not looking at her I lie, “Playing outside”. I am taking a chance in case it wasn’t her who saw me enter my friend’s house. I hope this enquiry is done.

But she continues. “You were playing in Annie’s house.” “Damn. She knows.” The next set of dialogues roll out, “How many times have we told you not to play in people’s houses....blah .. blah .. blah”.. Her face is getting contorted with anger. Her anger rises steadily, her pitch gets higher. I want to speak but her response would be, “You don’t understand. Don’t act so smart, don’t lie, just listen to me.” She is towering over me with trishool (a three pronged spear) shaped wrinkles on her forehead, her powerful finger wagging at me like it has the power to decapitate me. I feel her fury. I stop listening. I want to crouch in the corner and make myself smaller but that would make her even more angry. Any action on my part would only make her more angry and I would get more hurt. So I decide to not speak at all. I wish she would hug me and I could just cry, but that would never happen. I stand there frozen, wishing I could be invisible or I could fly away. I tell myself, “She hates me. This will end soon as I will escape all of this. This is not where I am meant to be. My place in the world is somewhere else. There I will not trouble them and they will not trouble me.”

Maya’s meaning-making was very evident in her narrative. I invited her to visit the scene again, but

this time her mum would be five years old. Maya smiled the moment she heard this.

In the second narration, I asked her for some more details, "What are you doing with your friend?" "We are trying on makeup", she said. "My friend is a good dancer and has tons of makeup and artificial jewellery. We play with makeup, she shows me her dance moves and shares some stories. Two hours pass by." I noticed her face brighten. "This sounds like fun," I said. "Oh it is great fun!" she agreed, beaming. "So are you going back home with makeup on your face?" curiously engaging with her. "No I have scrubbed it clean. I am very good at hiding things from mom," she said grinning. "That is very clever of you," I said. "I go back home and change my clothes. And mum (5-year old) comes in." Maya giggled for a moment, "She is so tiny." I reminded her to imagine her mum in the same clothes as the earlier scene. Her words, gestures and tone remain the same. This mum is also fiercely frowning, with the trishool shaped lines on her forehead and finger wagging to decapitate her. "What happens now?" I ask her.

"I say to mum, 'I just wanted to play. There was no one outside. What else could I have done if I wanted to play?'" I observed her challenging tone. At this moment Maya paused and opened her eyes and said, "Actually that's all I wanted to say. I wanted to tell my mom that I just wanted to play." "So say it now to her", I encouraged her. She closed her eyes and continued, "Mum, I just wanted to play. It was just Annie's house. You all are so friendly with their parents, then why can't I go there? Why do you make a big deal out of everything? Are you not really friends? Are they not good people? What do you know that I don't know?"

Maya opened her eyes again and looked at me brightly as if she had made a discovery, "I always felt they were never open with me. All their disciplining was based on a bag of secrets. Nothing was up for discussion. It made me feel I don't know enough and so I was not to decide anything for myself. I also feel resentful at their volley of judgements passed about me when I questioned them. It was a deadlock." "Good awareness," I said, inviting her to close her eyes again and go back to the scene."

Maya closed her eyes and said to mom, "I want to hear something more than what I am supposed to! I want to know why you don't want me to play in Annie's house?" Mum says, 'We don't know what can happen in other people's houses.' She looks scared."

"She looks scared," I repeated, "How do you respond?"

"Inside of me that internal battle is not happening. I don't have this urge to run away. I am able to listen

to her and it doesn't seem threatening. I feel like saying, "It is not such a big deal. Let it go. Don't feel so scared for me."

In my work with Maya I invited her to float above the scene and take a bird's eye view of the same. "What do you see?" I asked her. "I see two kids. My mother and me," she said, "She is so scared of life. She is always scared about my safety, my future." "And what about you," I asked. "I am scared of her judgement and rejection of me, but I am not scared of life. Living by their rules was suffocating, and I rebelled in very many creative ways. I would go again to Annie's house despite the drama."

I then asked her, "From this position in the sky, would you like to say something to little Maya locked in this battle with her mother."

"I can see you getting hurt. I feel sad. I see you believing that you create problems for everybody. But there is nothing wrong with you. You were expected to be serious when all you wanted to do was have fun. Mum was scared. I am delighted that you did not let her fear stop you from having fun. And you always came back home. You knew that despite all the drama you were safe."

"Does little Maya want to say anything to you?" I asked. Maya spoke as little Maya, "I know I have fun secretly. But I am ashamed. I want to be who I am openly, with pride. It is exhausting to battle them all the time."

The older Maya and little Maya made contact and embraced each other in imagination. Maya felt immense love and admiration for the little one. "You can be who you are openly. I will support you. I want more of you in my life. You have such a zest for life."

"How are you feeling?" I asked Maya. "Very light. The heaviness in my chest is no longer there." She was breathing easily. Her face looked relaxed. She was smiling.

Maya's redecision

Maya had a new story. In the new story, she discovered to her delight that she was already doing what she liked and that she was not scared of life. She developed admiration for her younger self who had taken charge of herself in her own creative way in the face of mum's anger. Her resourcefulness and creativity got amplified in the new story. She had a new emotion and a new way of explaining her experience. In the new narrative, despite the drama, "It was safe to come home." The past was reconstructed. Mum was seen as scared, not angry. The Parent and Child ego states were no longer in conflict. Floating above the scene, she was able to offer the comfort and permissions she desired from her mother to her younger self. We consider this the

development of a new parental stance that was healing. (McNeel, 2016). These permissions implied a further disentangling from mother. The embrace of older and little Maya was a symbolic integration of the vulnerable self. In the new story, it was safe to be herself. The visual imagery is congruent with the emotions and meaning associated with this image. Maya was breathing easy, looking relaxed and smiling.

Some considerations in the use of imagination and imagery

Imagining that imagery would work with everyone would be magical thinking on part of the therapist. Like other therapeutic methods, the practitioner must make choices about when and with whom to use imagery based redecision therapy. As Clark (1996) says, "... there are no absolutes in therapy. Each client is unique, and growth will occur within a therapeutic relationship that honors that uniqueness." (p.312).

Imagery would work best with clients who find it easy to describe images vividly and enjoy working with imagery. "People who think of themselves as very logical, rational, and practical may shy away from using imagination, considering such ventures into imagery as beyond their ability, as "not their style," or even as uncontrolled or threatening." (Ronen, 2011, p.102).

The process has to be meaningful to the client. "Simply asking the patient to imagine some fantastical outcome that could never have happened will not be helpful unless the imagery transformation challenges the toxic meaning of the original memory." (Wheatley and Hackmann, 2011, p. 445).

Images can very quickly evoke overwhelming emotions, and therefore have potential for harm for clients who are not ready yet to contain them. Given that memories connected to a child giving up its autonomy can be distressing, the therapist must have attended to strengthening the Adult and building a strong, trusting working alliance in the initial phases of therapy. The process must be used only when the therapist feels confident that the Child ego state feels supported and ready to relive the traumatic event.

Thus processes such as these cannot work unless there is a trusting relationship between the therapist and client. Judy Barr (1987) elaborates Kegan's description of the therapeutic relationship as a delicate tapestry, the purpose of which is "to keep buoyant the life project of the evolving person" (Kegan, 1982, p. 16)."(p.135). She sees this tapestry as interwoven with two sets of threads, the foundational threads representing the core relationship and the woven threads representing the

concepts or techniques that the therapist selects using own judgement of what could help the client.

Change is happening at two levels. At the conscious level the client believes that they have found alternate resources by themselves. But the change has happened because at an unconscious level they have taken in the therapist's tenacious faith that they had the resources in themselves all the time.

For imagination to work in therapy, the therapist also needs to be curiously excited by possibilities. Through the therapist's rapt attention and compassionate curiosity as the story unfolds, the client takes in the permissions to boldly imagine new ways of being. "The decision on the patient's part to risk change is made by A1 after an intuitive assessment of therapist's "magic." (White and White, 1975, p.22).

Even if clients just play with the imagery, they learn that it is less determined than they believed it was. It leaves room for them to challenge the image and to enter it as an active agent of constructing meaning. Both the processes that we have detailed in this article offer a structure, but they are not directive. We do not recommend that therapists feed words to their clients. Clients are invited to assume intentional authorship of their narrative events.

McNeel (2018) says that accepting a new belief is not enough for sustainable change. He discusses the importance of reinforcing the new belief through intentionally engaging in new behaviours. We concur and suggest that the new image or story reflecting the client's new belief can be revisited multiple times in therapy offering clients the chance to experiment with and cement the new belief.

In conclusion

Transactional analysis offers a strong cognitive framework to understand intrapsychic processes while offering tremendous creative flexibility in the methods to work with clients. We wrote this article with the hope that it would inspire practitioners to give imagination a more central place in transactional analysis practice. Imagination is not a rare gift available only to exceptional people. (all of us have it some way).

We wonder how the landscape of our practice would change if we trusted ourselves and our clients to be imaginative.

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