

Deep diving towards a vision for social justice: A visual dream matrix

A Workshop by:

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Abstract

This article explores the utilisation of social dreaming as a methodology to engage conference participants at the University of Johannesburg's Art Therapy in the Global South Conference with the theme *Training Art Therapists for Social Justice* in understanding the interplay between individual and group psyche. Through group analytic techniques, participants shared nighttime dreams and free associations related to the conference theme of social justice, creating a collaborative space for reflection and new knowledge generation. The structured process, reminiscent of community gatherings, facilitated creative expression and collective resonance, fostering a democratic approach to learning and teaching. Themes such as trauma, repression, and societal injustices emerged, providing insight into both personal and collective experiences. The article highlights the transformative potential of social dreaming in eliciting deep reflection and societal awareness.

Reflections on the Social Dreaming workshop by Hayley Berman

Social dreaming was introduced as a methodology of engaging all conference participants at the University of Johannesburg who attended in person. This group analytic method provided a way of understanding the relationship between the individual and group psyche, illuminating the social milieu and unconscious of this particular group. An experiential space was provided for participants to engage in a group formation known as a matrix to share nighttime dreams and free associations responding to the social, political, and personal resonance with the theme of the conference (social justice). These dreams were available for use as objects with which to freely associate and engage in the realm of play. In the process of sharing and reflecting, new knowledge was created, and a shared sense of societal and communal imagery came together to form something mutually resonant.

The structure held the ethos of democratising learning and teaching. We recreated a time when communities gathered to talk about their dreams, create together, play together and dream together. The transitions between conscious and unconscious language allowed for the emergence of new feelings and thinking to arise. It is also an experience of group-based visual research. This process facilitated participants' creative and collaborative abilities and potential.

We gathered in an organic variation of what Gordon Lawrence (founder of social dreaming) called a 'snowflake formation', where participants placed their chairs in such a way that there was no eye contact (Figure 1). This approximated the analysand on a couch, free to free associate without the distraction of the gaze of the other. An initial dream was brought by a group member with the invitation for others to associate the dream with other dreams, poems, songs, images, or metaphors that came to mind. The matrix lasted approximately 45 minutes. The hosts offered moments of reflection and wove some of the themes as a containing function.

We moved from the 'snowflake formation' to a large group discussion. Time was created after this image matrix process to bring the group back into a more conscious state of relating, preparing the group for the return to the outside world. We offered a more structured cognitive approach to thinking and making meaning. This process elicited the social unconscious of the

collective group experience, which was generated from dreams, associations, image making, and reflexive responses.



Figure 1: Social dreaming matrix that took place at the UJ art therapy conference with conference participants, 2023

The themes that emerged included being lost, feeling helpless, and trauma of the past and the present. Remembering and forgetting, the comfort of repression, and not wanting to remember the social injustices in our country. A sense of not wanting to revisit the discomfort of difficult stuff. We became aware of the search for the injustices outside and the need and invitation to look within at our own power and powerlessness. A visceral embodiment of these feelings emerged in the matrix when there was 'load shedding' and the lights went out. This experience powerfully located us all in the present fears and traumas, including water shortages, corruption, and crime.

This process allowed traumatic experiences to find a relational home in the group. The creation of a holding intersubjective space facilitated reparation and attunement, which is necessary to mitigate enduring trauma and social injustice. This approach disrupts established norms of academic discourse, encouraging individuals and groups to unmute and find a voice in creative resistance.