

## University of Warwick MPhil PhD upgrade 2008

### **An investigation into the space where Drama and Dramatherapy meet. What does this mean in conceptual and practical terms for practitioner and participant?**

#### **1. Introduction**

This research is an attempt to describe the similarities and differences between drama and dramatherapy and the space between them. I shall be approaching this work from the perspective of a qualified, state registered, experienced dramatherapist interested in the 'drama' within the dramatherapy.

This work will add to the body of knowledge in dramatherapy and the teaching of drama within educational settings; and will develop the understanding between the two disciplines and inform practice.

I have a diverse background in drama and education having worked in a wide range of community and educational settings as a drama educator for 20 years and concurrently as a dramatherapist for the last twelve years. At a time when dramatherapy is seeking to consolidate its research<sup>1</sup>, and the debate of applied theatre (Thompson: 2003, Nicholson :2005) is forming relationships within the socio political and therapeutic fields (Neelands 2007) I feel I am uniquely placed to carry out this piece of research.

The core of this research will be two 'case studies' (Stake 1995, Yin 2003) in two separate schools. One case study will be a 'drama group', with broadly educational aims within an educational context. The second group will be a 'dramatherapy group', with broadly therapeutic aims within a therapeutic context, though within a school educational environment. Both case studies will be carried out with the close cooperation of teaching staff.

#### **Drama and Therapy: Theoretical Backgrounds**

From the beginnings of theatre, writers such as Aristotle have suggested an emotional connection between audience and actor to theatre using 'Catharsis', (Halliwell 1998) the purging of emotions. There are many examples of actors specifically who go through extreme emotional experiences whilst playing roles on stage. 'Saint Genesius,' (Lockert 1968) ironically the patron Saint of Actors, in a mythical 16<sup>th</sup> century 'play within a play,' hears the voice of God whilst acting on stage and embraces the Christian faith. He is executed for this at the behest of an anti Christian emperor.

Modern theatre practitioners and academics such as Schechner suggest it is difficult to separate 'entertainment and ritual (which are) braided together neither one being the 'original' of the other' (Schechner 1988: 173). He also draws strongly on the work of anthropologist Victor Turner (1982) who uses the idea of the limbic or liminal space

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<sup>1</sup> The British Association of Dramatherapists is currently seeking to employ a researcher to bring together all the strands of current Dramatherapy Research. See Prompt Newsletter Spring 2008

to describe something that is different from the everyday space in which we all exist. Turner is interestingly a central text in the medical anthropology training of dramatherapists.

## Dramatherapy

A perusal of dramatherapy literature will find few books published before the early 1990's. Since then there has been a steady development of literature. According to Jones (1998, 2005, 2007) 'The term 'dramatherapy' refers to drama as a form of therapy.' (Jones 1998:1) More helpfully he goes on to say that over the last twenty years dramatherapy has been practised in a way in which the 'drama itself is the therapy.'(Jones 1998:4) He also suggests that unlike similar therapeutic approaches in dramatherapy 'The drama does not serve the therapy. The drama process contains the therapy.'(Jones 1998:4).

Jones 1998 book is important in that he is one of the first to define what happens within dramatherapy. His ground breaking work categorised and described nine core processes. This work is now in its second edition and is considered essential reading for all student dramatherapists.

Dramatherapy is a new and emerging field; training courses in the UK have only existed since the 1970's. Pioneers such as Sue Jennings (1978, 92, 95, 97) described as 'the grandmother of dramatherapy'<sup>2</sup>, has written many books on the subject and is heavily influenced by the drama educationalist Peter Slade (1954, 1995). The dramatherapy profession holds Slade to be its forerunner and, he is reputedly the first person known to use the phrase dramatherapy (Slade 1995 252 - ). Jennings developed dramatherapy from special education starting with her ground breaking book 'Remedial Drama' in 1978.

Due to its very nature as a new profession there is still debate around the overlap between drama and dramatherapy as witnessed by a range of discussions at the 2004 IDEA Conference in Ottawa. Adam Blantner (1996, 2000) led a special interest group with people from drama, teaching and therapy backgrounds, all of whom had a range of differing views on what dramatherapy was and who could be a dramatherapist. They ironically suggested that, due to the lack of qualified dramatherapists the 'drama teacher is often the closest thing to being a therapist many of their students have.'<sup>3</sup> Despite state registration now occurring in the UK and US for dramatherapists this incident shows there is still overlap in thinking between the professions of dramatherapy and drama teaching.

This debate also exists from the educational dramatist's perspective of dramatherapy. Courtney (1989) writing in the late 1980's said of dramatherapists 'Most therapists are eclectic. Not belonging to any one school ...Most of their techniques are spontaneously dramatic and they can come from disparate sources: Slade or Way, Ward or Siks, Spolin or Johnson, Heathcote or Brook, Moreno or Perls.'(Courtney 1989:83) Interestingly Jacob Moreno (1953) is seen as the founding father of psychodrama which has historically a different route through psychotherapy. In his

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<sup>2</sup> anecdotally referenced in audio transmission (2007)

<sup>3</sup> IDEA Conference 2004 pg 5

forward to Landy's 'Essays in Dramatherapy' (1996) Gavin Bolton an educational dramatist (1979, 1984) described dramatherapy as 'a hybrid form of one to one and group healing, derived from theatre and psychotherapy' (Landy 1996: IX). A leading British educational dramatist writing a forward to a book by a leading US dramatherapist is further evidence of an overlap between dramatherapists and leading drama educators.

Edwards (Payne 1990:7) wrote in 1990 of the paucity of arts therapy research projects. Grainger suggests that 'Accounts of the therapeutic effects of dramatherapy tend to be somewhat vague often couched in psychoanalytic language about the achievement of catharsis and the reintroduction of repressed material to consciousness, effects which are notoriously difficult to isolate' (Grainger 1999:50). In a call for papers in 1988 and again in 1992 the number of pieces of research either completed or being carried out by dramatherapists within the UK came to about 31. However all of this research was carried out by only 7 individuals (Payne 1990:42). According to Ansdell & Mercedes 'An encouraging development in arts therapies research, is that increasingly since the early 1990's arts therapists 'are doing it themselves' (Ansdell & Mercedes 2001: 17) as opposed to getting professional researchers in to carry out work for them. It is however widely acknowledged anecdotally that most dramatherapists are too busy trying to find work and get jobs, in a new profession few understand, rather than carry out research. My suspicion is that things have not changed much since the 1990's. If we also align this with the arts therapist's resistance to write down in concrete terms their experiences, it gives some insight into the lack of research being carried out, especially work of a more quantitative nature and at PhD level.

I am aware that some researchers may criticise the therapist playing the role of researcher and therapist at the same time. Ansdell and Mercedes, however, feel that it is increasingly useful as arts therapists have 'insider knowledge' (Ansdell & Mercedes 2001: 17) and bring unique reflective qualities to the research.

As dramatherapy is a new profession I can correspond directly with the majority of its founders, many of whom have influenced me either directly through my training, such as Jones and Jennings, (UK) or indirectly through their writings. Professor Robert Landy (1993, 94, 96, 2001, 2007) New York University is widely regarded as one of the founders of 'drama therapy' in the US.<sup>4</sup> In a recent interview with me he described my work as 'exciting'<sup>5</sup> He went on to say to me that 'My latest thinking is that all drama is about the same thing ...about people creating a distance between the everyday reality and the reality of the imagination... My feeling is that all forms of drama are potentially therapeutic, that is they can bring about a greater sense of balance for any human being who has difficulty processing the real world. That doesn't make it therapy. That is the contract. *I* (Landy) the therapist will guide you through to allow you to get back to what you've always known to be true.'<sup>6</sup>

Professor Sue Jennings in a very recent pod cast felt that dramatherapy can now be connected to the socio political field of action methods within social education and is

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<sup>4</sup> Spelt using two words in the US one word in the UK.

<sup>5</sup> Landy interview 8.9.07

<sup>6</sup> Landy interview 8.9.07

encouraging dramatherapy to make these links.<sup>7</sup> She is critical of the arts therapies being discrete practices within the UK. She feels dramatherapy needs to have more of an organic development. Jennings feels that the development of dramatherapy as a 'profession' in itself may not have been the right way to move forward.<sup>8</sup> State registration for dramatherapists in the UK occurred in the mid 1990's after going through the House of Lords and is now governed by the Health Professions Council (HPC).

Across two continents we can see the differing approaches and perspectives from two of the leading individuals within dramatherapy. This again suggests that dramatherapy is still defining itself. I feel that my research will be able to assist further both the development of dramatherapy and the continuing dialogue it is having with drama Educators.

### Drama - in an Educational Context

According to Neelands, 'drama (in the educational context) is not concerned with the transmission of theatre skills, as it is with the construction of imagined experience.' (Neelands 1984: 6) He goes on to explain that the 'experience' is about the child directly experiencing the drama as opposed to performing it. Neelands suggests drama in an educational context should be 'practical', 'social', 'active', and that the teacher should attempt to 'match the child's existing experience of play to the less familiar forms of theatre in order to focus and deepen the child's learning experience.' (Neelands 1984:7) Neelands also suggests that schools have differing perspectives on what 'drama' is to them, and that it can be taught in the context of 'personal and social education', as 'English' and as the subject itself 'drama.' (Neelands 1998 16-17).

Drama education as a field itself is contentious. Gavin Bolton (1979, 1984) and Dorothy Heathcote (see Johnson & O'Neil 1991) suggest an approach to drama education which is more socially and emotionally orientated hence somewhat akin to therapy. More recently Neelands suggests that 'It is quite legitimate for theatre to be both therapeutic and politically challenging.' (Neelands 2007:313). He also states that a 'limited process of theatrical engagement' (Neelands 2007: 314) can produce meaningful differences in peoples lives. Neelands accepts that drama can have a therapeutic function but leans towards drama education as having more of a political and social function. Hence his views appear similar to Jennings, though she comes from the perspective of Dramatherapy.<sup>9</sup>

Further political education and therapeutic connections have been made by Boal (1988, 1992, and 1995). His 'Theatre of the Oppressed' (Boal 1988) came from a socio-political background using drama in South America. Many of the techniques he developed such as 'forum theatre' and 'cop in the head' are akin to therapeutic techniques used within dramatherapy. Jones describes Boal's work as 'a tool to work towards personal and social revolution.' (Jones 1996: 53). Boal describes 'aesthetic space' a theatrical and therapeutic stage in which a performer can 'concretise' – the putting of their own real thoughts into concrete form (Boal 1995:24). Jones also

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<sup>7</sup> Jennings Pod Cast 17.11.07

<sup>8</sup> Jennings Pod Cast 17.11.07

<sup>9</sup> Jennings Pod Cast 17.11.07

describes the work of other influential theatre practitioners such as Brecht (Willett 1978) and Brook (1968) who also come from the political left. Boal, though not a therapist himself and not claiming to do therapy has had an impact on the development of dramatherapy. He firmly places his work within a socio political context similar to the views of both Neelands and Jennings. This begs the question, how might these socio political perspectives shared by different practitioners from two different fields have an impact on future development and direction of drama education and dramatherapy?

### Area of Investigation

How might we describe the space between these two disciplines drama and dramatherapy? What is the relationship? How can we describe it accurately? When, if ever does a reciprocal relationship develop between the two? If so is it significant? Finally what can a drama teacher and a dramatherapist learn from this and how might it inform their individual and collective practice in the therapy space or classroom context:

### *The Space Between*

Can we locate a space between drama and dramatherapy that is neither one nor the other? If so how might we describe this connectedness, this space, and its relationship to both disciplines?

### *Liminality*

A liminal space is often described as a threshold or an entrance way between two places – or as described by Turner as a ‘complex sequence of episodes in sacred space-time.’ (Turner 1982:27) Broadhurst suggests that ‘liminal performance can be described as being at the edge of what is possible.’ (Broadhurst 1999:12) Is dramatherapy on the furthest edge of drama? This may to an extent tie in with the therapeutic concept of the ‘space’ being somehow transformed during a therapeutic session. Could the same be said within a drama context?

Czarniawska and Mazza, lecturers in industrial economics (2003: 272), suggest more an opening up of liminal space. They open up the possibility that liminality is not kept in a sacred time and space but is something that continues. Ehrenreich concludes ‘anthropologist Victor Turner’s consignment of danced ritual to an occasional, marginal, or liminal status seems especially unwarranted in the prehistoric case – and more representative of the production-oriented mentality of our own industrial age than of prehistoric priorities.’ (Ehrenreich 2007:22). How can we describe ‘liminal space’? Can it be attributed to just a specific time and space within a therapeutic context? As Ehrenreich suggests, it might not be.

### *Bifurcation*

Could there be a specific moment where drama and dramatherapy separate. As suggested to me by David Read Johnson<sup>10</sup> another leading US dramatherapist (1999,

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with David Read Johnson 8.9.07

2000). Can we find a moment where the drama and the therapy separate from each other? If so at what specific time within a dramatic process does this occur, is it a constant and can we describe it and its effects.

### *Overlap*

Could it better be described as an overlap; where drama and dramatherapy merge together in such a way that neither is more significant? Is it a merging of the two where there is a space that is different from drama or dramatherapy around it? Creating something which is quite unique – is this some sort of unexpected or unplanned liminal space that requires a different term of explanation? And can this happen time and time again, and what factors need to be present so that it can occur.

### *Braided*

Or could it be similar to Schechner's description of 'entertainment and ritual (which) are braided together neither one being the 'original' of the other' (Schechner 1988:73) where the two become so intermingled and braided with each other that they are both as significant as the other, neither taking a lead? And again how does this happen how can we accurately identify it and describe it and what is its significance?

### *...Something Else*

Or is the space between drama and dramatherapy a combination of the above or something quite different? If so can we clearly explain and define it, when it happens, what causes it, and what this means for practitioners and their students or clients? How will this enrich and add to the body of knowledge in the disciplines of drama education and dramatherapy?

## 2. Methodological Approach – Case Study

Winston (2006:45) suggests ‘we use case study to seek out rather than solve problems, provoke rather than answer questions, deepen our understanding rather than rush to closure.’ Case study is therefore not a way of resolving questions, but a way of deepening the dialogue and provoking further questioning. Stake suggests that ‘emic’ questions ‘emerge from within, during the research process itself.’ (Winston 2006:50) My research will follow this vein.

Case Study (Stake 1995, Yin 2003) will be my main approach. I will be using a range of mixed methods<sup>11</sup> (Creswell 2003) including interview, video, reflective log, and double blind trial / critical observer to sample video excerpts. This is described later.

Case study is the most appropriate way to carry out this research. As Stake (1995) suggests ‘Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within the important circumstances.’ (Stake 1995: XI) The aim is to understand the complexity of human interactions and the sense of where the creative and therapeutic elements exist within both groups; and come to detailed conclusions on the similarities and differences between these two cases.

This case study is primarily an ‘intrinsic’ case study (Stake 1995:3) because we are studying it to learn about two cases in relationship to each other. It could be argued that it has elements of an ‘instrumental’ case study (Stake 1995:3) in that it could have implications as to what *might* happen in similar groups outside of this study. Stake acknowledged that the purpose of case study is ‘not necessarily to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it’ (Stake 1995:43). He also suggests. ‘Qualitative research tries to establish description, sometimes *thick description*, conveying to the reader what experience itself would convey.’ (Stake 1995:39).

It is my intention to carry out this research in two schools concurrently running ten one hour sessions in each.

**School A** - An arts specialist school in an urban part of the Black Country with a mix of cultural groups, in a largely working class area of social deprivation. It is a school which was formally under special measures.

**School B** – Is a Specialist Science School in an urban working class centre close to Birmingham, working with young people from areas of social deprivation. It has a strong drama bias and has a special unit for pupils from across the city who struggle in main stream education.

I intend to use a unique approach to have the same plan for both groups, which I will try to adhere to as much as possible. This will include the same warm-up exercises, the same activities, the same stories, characters and techniques. The only difference will be that one group will be called a ‘dramatherapy group’ with a dramatherapy contract in which I shall operate as a dramatherapist. The other will be called a ‘drama

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<sup>11</sup> See attached structure graph Appendix A below for an overview.

group' and will have a drama related contract and in which I will work as a drama teacher.

I will specifically create a scheme of work which will look at the same specific techniques, approaches and styles and see how they relate to 'a specific character' for example, break it down into its constituent parts; then look at its educative or therapeutic value within a drama or dramatherapy. A robust teaching / therapeutic plan will assist with this. I will then have a drama or dramatherapy purpose for each exercise, activity or story. Post group I will seek to find similarities or differences. I shall recruit two drama teachers and two dramatherapists who will post observe (via video tape) specific excerpts and offer objective theoretical thought and criticism.

## Ethics

I fully understand the complex ethical issues relating to a research project which includes firstly working with children in a school environment (Fraser et al 2004:97-111) and secondly using therapy (Badth 2004, 06). I have worked for many years as a dramatherapist and formally as a drama educator with vulnerable children and young people. I am fully CRB checked and have a good working knowledge of child protection legislation. (Children's Act 1989, Child Protection Act 1999). I currently work in child care services as a therapist. As a State Registered dramatherapist I also follow the guidelines set down by the Health Professions Council, (HPC) with whom I am registered and follow the Codes of Practice of The British Association of Dramatherapists and in particular BADth Education sub committees guidelines for 'Dramatherapists Working in Education (2004) and 'Protocol for Dramatherapy Practice in Schools' (2006).

Children and young people attending any form of therapy may feel they are seen by their peers as 'mad' or 'in need.' I will prepare students, teachers and parents by explaining clearly what dramatherapy is (to the relevant group) in written form, and that it offers a different kind of space to reflect on thoughts feelings and emotions. Those for whom the experience does bring up issues that they may struggle with will be offered appropriate support and help in consultation with myself and the school.

I will therefore:

- Ensure the health, safety, physical and mental well being of all group members at all times as paramount.
- Seek written permission from pupils and their parents/guardians to take part in the research. They must agree to pupils being interviewed and that video and audio will also be used as part of this process.
- Explain as clearly as possible the purpose of the research (see limitations below).
- Have a clear and defined process within each dramatherapy or drama group should a pupil need time out, or feel unable to continue within a particular session for whatever reason.
- Agree with each school the protocol for reporting any child protection issues.
- Work with and support the school in finding any additional support a pupil may require in the future as a result of knowledge gained from the research project.

- Agree the nature of the limitations to confidentiality; also with regard to video and audio, and take into account child protection legislation.
- Complete ethics approval paperwork and comply with Warwick University Ethics Committee directives.

### Limitations to Ethics

As this is a research project it will be essential to keep the drama/dramatherapy split in the two schools separate. Two separate school environments means less chance of 'seepage'. Therefore the drama group will be aware 'work' is going on in another school but will not be made fully aware that it is specifically 'dramatherapy' and vice versa. Without this limitation there is potential for final results to be distorted. If for example the drama group knew I was also a dramatherapist, and carrying out dramatherapy work elsewhere they may think they too were doing dramatherapy.

### ***Additional Research Methods – In order of Use***

#### *Survey – Already Completed*

Between September and December 2007 I carried out two on-line surveys with 54 drama teachers and 89 dramatherapists. The survey results will be reported in a separate presentation. It clearly shows that there is strong and developing interest between the field of dramatherapy and drama education.

#### *Reflective Log – Used throughout case study and post evaluation period.*

I will use a reflective log (Bridges 1999) throughout the process as it will play two roles. Firstly to write down specific moments or situations within each group that takes my attention. These notes will be written soon after the incidents. Secondly it will allow me to contemporaneously reflect weekly on my thoughts and feelings about the two groups as I go through the practical process. It will provide a very personal and qualitative perspective.

#### *Questionnaires – Pre & Post Case Study*

I will devise a series of questionnaires for the young people involved in both case studies. Using standard Lickert scale type questionnaires I will ask young people about their experiences of and their thoughts and feelings about the groups they are involved in. I shall carry out a pre and mid way questionnaire and a post questionnaire. I may also carry out a final questionnaire some time after the group has been completed. I shall analyse data from both groups and draw conclusions.

#### *Video & Audio – Post Case Study*

The use of video within this research will be purely a way of recording what happens and for both sets of critical observers and I to observe and post reflect on particular 'moments' within the drama and dramatherapy groups. All viewing will be restricted to the core group of researcher, critical observers and examiners as necessary and will be depicted in written form in the final dissertation. Group member's names and faces will not be used in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

### *Role of Critical Observer – Post Completion of Cast Study*

I intend to use four critical observers (Stake 1995: 8-12), two drama teachers and two dramatherapists:

- A drama teacher and dramatherapist will be asked to view selected video highlights from both groups, knowing which is the drama group and which the dramatherapy group. They will be asked to look specifically for both drama and dramatherapy moments within the excerpts and give opinions on their significance in relationship to the drama or dramatherapy group.
- A second drama teacher and second dramatherapist will be asked to observe the same video excerpts without knowing whether they are from the drama or dramatherapy group. They will give their opinion as to how the excerpt relates to drama or dramatherapy and what reasons they give for this. They will be approaching the work blind – not knowing whether it is the drama or dramatherapy.

This ‘double blind trial’ observation will be compared and contrasted with the non- ‘blind trial’ observations to see whether commonalities and links can be made between them. I will use a combination of scripted questionnaires and interview with the critical observers which will open up the debate around what the moments appear to mean to each profession. Work with critical observers may be done in an on line process. (See Jones 2008).

This work can then be followed up by asking the group members in those excerpts what the individual moments meant for them. I will then compare and contrast the opinions of the professionals and carry out formal interviews and questionnaires with group members post group completion.

### 3 Conclusions

Winston suggests the ‘issues of ethics and validity are of central concern to case study.’ (Winston 2006:45). Using survey, questionnaire, interview, video, critical observer, and reflective log will in some way provide a degree of objective assessment within the case study framework. Creswell (2003:217) suggests a ‘concurrent triangulation strategy using quantitative and qualitative methods which ‘offset’ weaknesses’. Winston points out more pragmatically ‘the concept of triangulation, of actively seeking perspectives other than one’s own, is the common approach but it will only work if the researcher is open and responsive to judgements different from her own and refuses to prioritise those that support what she already thinks.’ (Winston 2006:46) *This* researcher is willing to do this. The discipline, experience and skills of being a dramatherapist also allow me to be more aware when I am making assumptions or accepting the obvious. My skill as a dramatherapist is to allow the patterns of behaviours to be presented within a dramatic framework, to formulate a theoretical and therapeutic response, and more importantly, do this over time.

I hope that this research project will at the very least provide fresh perspectives on dramatherapy. It may provide a new theoretical framework to describe what happens intrinsically in *one* drama and *one* dramatherapy group and allow me to contrast them. This in turn may lead to further development in how the two professions may impact upon each other; how they are taught, how they develop, and create a richer dialogue between professionals concerned. Most importantly I hope this research will have a positive impact upon practitioner and recipient. It may also lead the way to larger funded projects in the future which will have a wider instrumental impact on both professions and be able to continue the research into these two fields.

Clive Holmwood  
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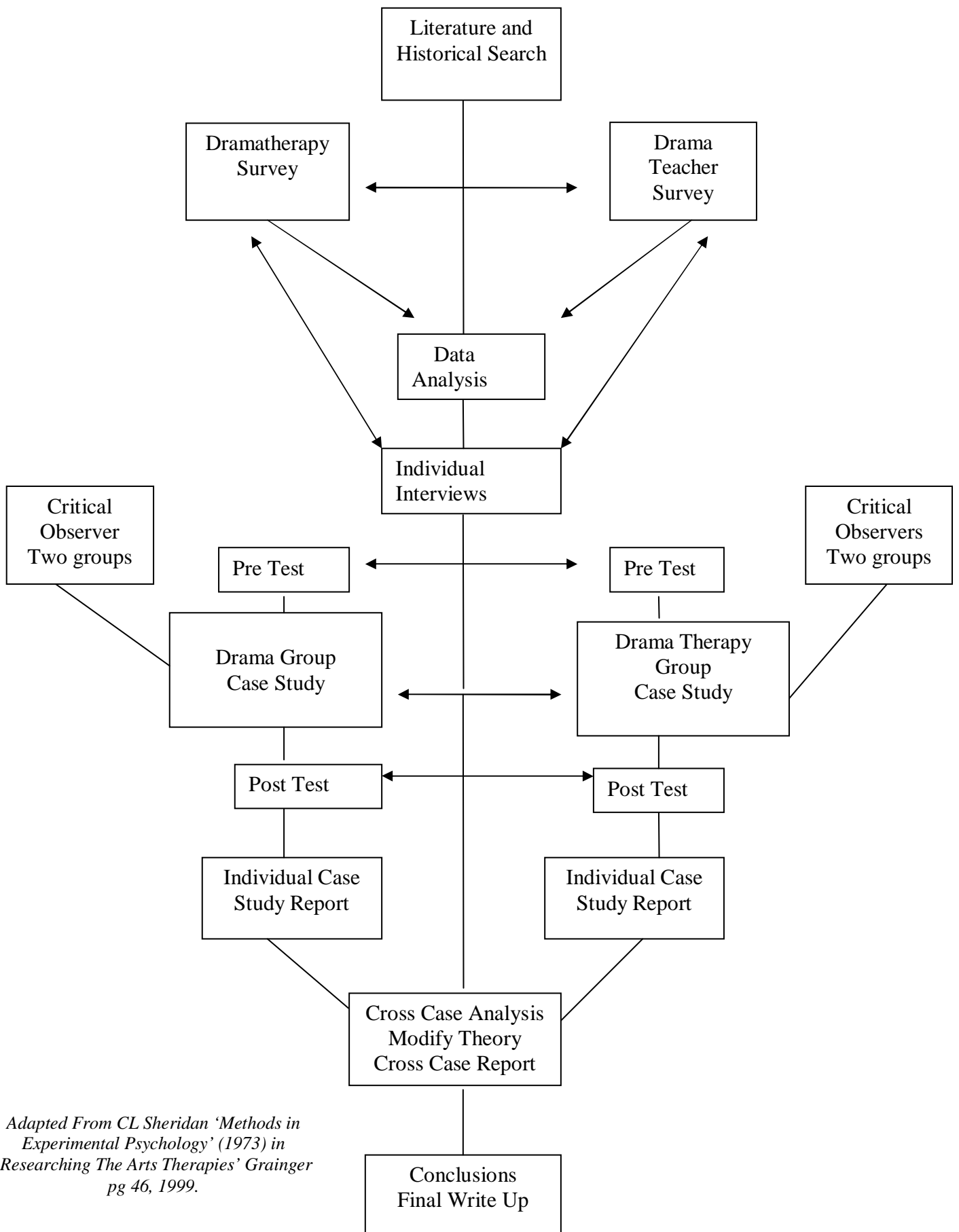
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## Appendix A PhD Structure



*Adapted From CL Sheridan 'Methods in Experimental Psychology' (1973) in 'Researching The Arts Therapies' Grainger pg 46, 1999.*