THE DEPTH AND BREADTH OF CONCRETISATION

“Understanding the learning processes that are activated and valuing what concretisation has to offer.”

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Abstract

This thesis examines the depth and breadth of how concretisation can be used. The learning processes activated by left-brain and right brain functioning are described so that the practitioner can gain a full appreciation of how concretisation works. Illustrations are given of how concretisation can be used in a wide variety of settings, from the counselling room, to the workplace and in health education.
Preface

My journey started at my first introduction to this method. I attended a four-day workshop run by Max Clayton, which felt like a baptism of fire. I was very warmed up and full of spontaneity when I arrived home.

I put to use what I had learned on my poor unsuspecting husband that very same day. We had a successful enactment with scene setting, role reversal, coaching, mirroring and concretisation. I was sold on the method because it ‘worked a treat’. My husband had faced his fears and had developed a new response to a very difficult situation in our very own living room.

My journey continued from that four-day workshop for the next seven years undertaking training with my Dunedin group. I have introduced psychodrama into my work as an Occupational Health Nurse and for the past year and half I have used the method in my counselling practice.

During training my supervisor had been telling me that I was over protective, not allowing people space to experience their pain. I had been well trained in my nursing to do everything that was possible to alleviate people’s pain. Both physically and emotionally it was a very over developed role in me and I was beginning to become aware of this.

In a training session my fellow trainees concretised this behaviour for me. They mirrored me acting like an ‘ugly suffocating placator’ in response to a group member’s distress. Something moved in me. From this time on whenever I was tempted to make things better for someone by drying up their tears, this picture would come back and I was able to tolerate the uncomfortable feelings that came with the display of pain and suffering.

I became interested in exploring why very small interventions using concretisation were so potent. These interventions enabled people to move quickly from fragmenting roles into progressive roles in what seemed like ‘lightning speed’. In some cases these developments
stood the test of time. I began to wonder what learning processes had to be activated to enable this to occur and for the learning to continue long after the event.

Why would I want to write a thesis on how we learn when most of my learning has been a struggle? I am dyslexic and learning for me had mostly been an unpleasant experience. Psychodrama was a pleasant surprise for me, it meant no written work and a way of learning which not only made sense to me but was also exciting. I wanted more and this was a new experience for me. I was soon to discover there was written work, assignments, and papers to be done. Previously, learning had resulted in much angst and upset, which usually lasted for days after the experience. It took me back to unhappy times that had resulted in my being unsure of myself. I started on a research trail seeking to understand why it was that this method was so successful for myself and others?

My first stop was to find out more about what dyslexia is and how it has interfered with my learning. Joan M Smith (cited in Davis, 1994:5) states, “A wide variety of symptoms are manifested by the dyslexic syndrome. The most frequently recognized characteristics include severe reading, spelling and writing delays and the reversal of symbols when reading.” Davis (1994) gave me many answers especially reaffirming that when learning is presented experientially people with dyslexia are able to master many things and are often faster at achieving this than what the average person can. This was an ‘aha moment’ for me (a moment of sudden insight or realisation). As I have worked with clients I have come to appreciate that by using concretisation people more readily experience an ‘aha moment’. This experience can lead to a change in how they view their life, which stimulates the development of new roles. So the question still remained for me as to what learning processes have to be put into action for new learning to occur.
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Introduction

Concretisation gives size and form to concepts, feelings and situations. Internal experiences are given symbolic form by choosing an object to represent a feeling, relationship or situation and placing it on the stage, or drawing it on paper.

The whole brain is activated in all learning. When concretisation is used the right side of the brain is activated first. This is the holistic intuitive side. Once you have ‘seen’ the issue (externalised in symbolic form), the left side comes in to play which involves the analytical functioning.

Whilst a concern remains in your head it is possible to kid yourself, to minimise the situation and avoid the stark reality. The toy most of us know as Jack in the box is a good metaphor for this. As long as Jack stays in his box he stays in the dark and we can pretend that Jack is not so big. Once the box is opened the bigness of Jack is seen, his colour, shape, how he stands and what he is made of, is visible. He can be viewed from all sides, all aspects can be seen, and nothing is hidden. When thoughts remain secret and in the dark recesses of our minds there is a greater likelihood of them becoming bigger and thus inevitably they hold more power. Distortions happen in the mind when only one aspect of the mind is used. With the use of concretisation a different perspective is gained and all of one’s faculties are utilised.

Concretisation creates an experience of different aspects of the self, leading to greater self-awareness. Once something is concretised there is an opportunity for a fuller experience. When this occurs all aspects of the self can come to life including the spiritual aspects of life.

Concretisation involves a number of learning processes which are very similar to the many facets involved in experiential learning. Experiential learning is one of the most natural means of learning and it is the one way we all have used as children as we explored our world.
Whenever there is a concrete experience this can often lead onto some examination and reflection. Metaphors are often used in this process to assist us to discover or shed light on the issues at hand and to bring unconscious ideas and emotions to the surface where they can be seen and worked with.

Concretisation, because it is a visual display, predominantly activates our right brain functioning. When this is triggered it can open up new ways of thinking. This is because it is the part of the brain which is the most intuitive and holistic. When the issue has been fully displayed our left-brain is able to analyze the information and this brings about new learning.

The use of concretisation can often enable us to access our inner being, which can connect us to our spiritual selves. For change and learning to be sustained our emotions need to be explored. When this happens spontaneity and creativity are brought into being and it is at this time that the protagonist is in their most active learning phase. When this occurs progressive roles and social atom repair are able to come about.

Concretisation gives physical form to feelings, thoughts or situations. This process makes the protagonist’s concern no longer an abstract notion, but something solid, real and specific. Concretisation tells the internal story by using external images, symbols and metaphors.

In the Literature Review that follows I describe the learning processes that concretisation triggers. Then examples of specific work are described where concretisation has been the primary intervention.
Literature Review

The Oxford dictionary (1969) has this definition for concretisation:

“*In the sphere of reality or practice, not of conception or theory*”.

Through concretisation the protagonist changes issues from mere theories and verbal constructs into observable realities that can be seen and worked with to bring about social atom repair and the development of progressive roles.

Dayton (1994:31) defines concretisation: “*This process of concretisation is, in itself, healing and cathartic. Simply to expose our inner reality in the present moment and in space brings it to a conscious level where it can be seen, felt and dealt with in new ways. The entire process of concretisation is designed to pull the surplus reality out of the psyche of the protagonist and to place it on stage where it can be moved through in a safe and clinically appropriate manner*.”

According to Williams (1989:17): “*Concretisation is the term used most frequently for the acting-out of a metaphor unwittingly produced by the protagonist or deliberately introduced by the director*.”

The Learning Process

Beard & Wilson (2006) say that the use of metaphors can help people to understand feelings that might have otherwise have stayed abstract and not fully understood: “*A metaphor can provide another way of reflecting and focusing on a particular experience, so allowing us to gain new insights*.” (Beard & Wilson 2006:207).

A metaphor must have value for it to bring about change and learning. It can provide a lasting picture which when accessed after the event can jog the person’s memory and give them the strength to act in a new and progressive way.

Smith (1992:1) states that learning brings about a “*relatively permanent change in what a person does or is capable of doing which results from the person’s experience. Although we can only know that learning has occurred by looking at what a person does or how they*
behave after being exposed to experiences, it is important to remember that learning influences ideas, attitudes and values as well as skills and activities.”

Concretisation is a learning process that can result in a relatively permanent change; it can influence clients’ ideas about themselves and it acts as a mirror allowing them to see themselves with clarity. This can result in new attitudes and values developing.

When learning happens through experience all the senses can come into play. Beard and Wilson (2006:7) explain it this way. “The more senses we use in an activity the more memorable the learning experience will become because it increase the neural connections in our brains and therefore will be more accessible. The greater the involvement of the participant in the learning activity the deeper will be the participant’s learning and therefore the greater the effect on future thought and behaviour.”

Concretisation allows this process to happen with the following example demonstrating this:

A protagonist is invited to concretise their cat. The first step is to make the abstract concrete by asking the protagonist to imagine the cat in their mind’s eye and inviting them to choose an object to represent the cat. A tissue box is chosen to be the cat. The protagonist looks at the box and can project the values and qualities of the cat onto the tissue box. They then wonder if this tissue box accurately represents their cat. When asked why they have chosen the box they observe and reflect and notice that what they have created is soft and about the correct size for the cat. They then realize that it does not quite show the full attitude of their cat. Adjustments are made to make sure it is a good fit and a stapler is added. This new representation is observed and reflected on to test its value. It is found to meet all requirements. The protagonist observes the tissue box and stapler and all her senses come into play. She feels, smells, hears and can see her ‘cat’. Her warm-up deepens and she begins to really experience her cat and her relationship with the cat.

New learning that is gained through an experience has the potential to break old ways of seeing the world. Concretisation allows protagonists to fully experience themselves and this is one way that new learning occurs.
David Kolb along with Roger Fry created their now famous model, which describes and identifies the four elements of the learning process.

*The Experiential Learning Cycle* (Kolb & Fry 1975)

Brookfield explores experiential learning further and offers two ways to look at this:

“Experiential learning has tended to use the term experiential learning in two contrasting senses. On the one hand the term is used to describe the sort of learning undertaken by students who are given a chance to acquire and apply knowledge, skills and feelings in an immediate and relevant setting. Experiential learning thus involves a direct encounter with the phenomena being studied rather than merely thinking about the encounter, or only considering the possibility of doing something about it.” (Borzak 1981:9 quoted in Brookfield 1983). This sort of learning is sponsored by an institution and might be used on training programmes. The second type of experiential learning is education that occurs
through direct participation in events of life (Houle 1980:221). Here learning is not sponsored by some formal education institution but by people themselves. It is learning that is achieved through reflection upon every day experience.” Brookfield (1983:16)

This is the way most of us do our learning. Concretisation taps into this type of learning situation. When thoughts or feelings are made concrete a person is able to observe and reflect on the truth of their situation. They gain greater self-awareness which is a precursor to personal change.

**Left Brain Right Brain**

When the right brain is functioning it employs incidental thoughts, intuitive thinking, and holistic views. It involves being able to see two or more actions at the same time and at speed, and this in turn makes it possible to look at the whole picture. Whereas the left-brain’s function is one of logical thinking, sequential actions, rational thought processes and an analytical approach which allows the person to continue to look at their situation in a compartmentalized manner. For learning to be lasting and to have meaning both the left and right brain must be involved. It is my experience that when the right brain is activated the protagonist is able to tap into previous unknown insights. When the left-brain is subsequently used to explore and analyze these insights then new and progressive roles can be activated. This learning requires the whole brain to be activated.

Jensen (1994) quotes work done by J Levy (1983) “Levy has confirmed that both sides of the brain are involved in nearly every human activity. It’s all a matter of timing and degree of involvement. What we can safely say about each hemisphere is that the left side processes ‘Parts’ (sequentially) and the right side processes ‘Wholes’ (gestalt). As J Levy states it is all a matter of timing (Jensen 1994:4).

When left-brain activity is in operation, intellectual knowing stays contained and abstract. When the right brain is activated through concretisation then the thinking processes become more expansive allowing spontaneity and creativity to emerge. This enables new roles to develop and the old conserved patterns and habits to drop away. Eric Jensen says activities that are designed only for the right brain like visualizing, drawing or role playing often leave some learners frustrated unless they are followed up by discussion or some
other left hemisphere activity. Jenson advises to set up activities for the right brain to experience the ‘aha’ of discovery and then follow up with the left-brain processing.

Concretisation can thus be seen as an activity of right brain functioning which when followed up by reflection activates the functions of the left-brain.

The following example illustrates the impact of activating right brain functioning:

“A man dates his quitting smoking from a day on which he had gone to pick up his children at the city library. A thunderstorm greeted him as he arrived there; and at the same time a search of his pockets disclosed a familiar problem. He was out of cigarettes. Glancing back at the library, he caught a glimpse of his children stepping out in the rain, but he continued around the corner, certain that he could find a parking space, rush in, buy the cigarettes, and be back before the children got seriously wet. The view of himself as a father who would “actually leave the kids in the rain while he ran after cigarettes was humiliating and he quit smoking”.
(Miller & Rollnick 2002:23).

Seeing himself in this scenario as someone prepared to put his children at risk for the sake of buying cigarettes was a form of concretisation, which in turn activated his right brain functioning. When the right brain is activated the whole situation is ‘seen’. Activating his right brain, allowed him to look at the whole state of affairs, including the truth of the situation, and this enabled him to take responsibility. When the man was operating from his left-brain he could rationalize and analyze his behaviour and say his smoking was only hurting himself.

When this father saw the whole picture of how his behaviour was impacting on his children he gave up the old compartmentalized way of operating. He was able to immediately access a progressive role where he put the needs of his children first.

Baakman (1997:19) explains it this way: “The concrete nature of setting a scene counters denial, depersonalisation and distortions in perception, and as such assist in reality testing.” Once feelings are made concrete there is no denial of their existence and this give the protagonist a new awareness of the functioning.
**Spiritual and Emotional Learning**

Moreno talks about the ‘Creator within’ when he says that we are co creators with God when we are using our creativity. When Moreno introduced psychodrama, society was advancing with lighting speed. Machines were becoming more and more advanced and technology was increasing. Moreno used what he saw happening with machines and pointed out that machine’s could only do the same old thing over and over but if you put a spontaneous human behind them in a co-creation relationship with God then anything was possible. We are all made in the image of God. The Bible describes it this way. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them” (Genesis 1 verse 27). In the study notes of The Bible (1997:7) it is put in this way: “Some feel that our reason, creativity, speech or self-determination is the image of God”.

Beard and Wilson (2006:218) describe spiritual intelligence as “Interconnectedness with the inner and outer world and the ability to sense the higher-self”.

When using objects or auxiliaries on stage to concretise feelings, the protagonist is able to see the situation and access their own wisdom. When the right brain is brought into play they are able to think holistically and this in turn engages their creativity. At this time they need wise and sensitive doubling from the therapist to boost self-acceptance. There is a co-creating, a bringing to life of the new and vulnerable self. When they do this they may well be in connection with God.

There have been a number of books written in the last few years on emotional intelligence. When a person has no idea of their emotions or those of others it can lead them to become isolated and misunderstood, as they are unaware when they have been insensitive to others. Beard and Wilson (2006:223) say that emotional intelligence can be described as: “Knowing one’s emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others, and handling relationships”.

Calling all of this human functioning ‘intelligence’ suggests that it cannot be changed. A better terminology is ‘emotional learning’. Another definition could be what the Oxford Dictionary (1969) describes as ‘tact’: “The delicate perception of the right thing to do or say”. Tact implies role-reversal and consideration of others.
Concretisation allows the protagonist to see and feel things that have been hidden in their subconscious. The protagonist projects their feelings into concrete form where they can be seen and experienced in a fresh way. When this happens emotional learning and skills begin to develop.

**Spontaneity and Creativity**

Concretisation, because it involves all the senses, moves the protagonist beyond merely thinking about an issue to assisting them to connect to their unconscious. This in turn assists their creativity. Once the unconscious has been made conscious creativity is brought to life and the protagonist is able to activate their spontaneity and try out new ways of acting and being.

Moreno (1978:39) says, “Spontaneity and creativity are not identical or similar processes. They are not different categories, although strategically linked. In the case of Man his spontaneity may be diametrically opposite to his creativity an individual may have a high degree of spontaneity but be entirely uncreative, a spontaneous idiot. Another individual may have a high degree of creativity but be entirely without spontaneity, a creator ‘without arms’.”

A protagonist uses their creativity whenever they concretise an issue. This process warms them up more fully and engages their spontaneity.

Moreno (1978:42) states that “Spontaneity operates in the present, now and here; it propels the individual towards an adequate response to a new situation or a new response to an old situation.”

**Progressive Roles**

Out of the experience of concretisation progressive roles can develop very naturally, and in some cases with lightning speed. The protagonist now has a visual memory of the experience of concretisation when they were acting in a progressive role. The lasting picture that was created in their mind is able to be recalled and enables them to continue to act from their new role state.
Turner (2002:32) states that: “progressive role development occurs when the conditions in life have been favourable enough, when there has been enough doubling and mirroring to ensure the integration of thinking, feeling and acting in each of the roles taken up.”

In the process of concretisation the therapist provides doubling as they stand alongside and encourage the protagonist to set out the issue and continues to double as the protagonist reflects on what they have set out. Mirroring happens in the process of setting out the situation and then the protagonist is able to see themselves in a new and different role.

New role development is more likely to be lasting if a picture is fixed in the mind of the protagonist. For new roles to be sustained the protagonist will have needed adequate doubling and mirroring. When the protagonist is able to recall the concretisation, they remember the relationship that they developed with the therapist. If the therapist has been a worthy double then the protagonist is able to move into a progressive role and maintain it.

Turner (2002:18) describes it this way: “New beginnings are sustained more easily if they are witnessed. Witnessing concretises what has happened. Very often the first movement toward something new is not noticed by the protagonist. At this point they are unconscious and will still be living an old script. A primary function of the double is to bring into awareness the unknown.”

Concretisation often brings the unconscious to the conscious and the protagonist requires strong doubling at this point because they are not always aware of the new. They are often very vulnerable at this time of new discovery.

**Social Atom Repair**

Through concretisation social atom repair can be accomplished. When a lasting picture is achieved through the concretisation of new progressive roles, it gives the protagonist something strong to hang on to and social atom repair can happen.

Clayton (1993:55) states: “The development of new roles and role system may be referred to as social atom repair. Social atom repair refers to any reorganization or any development in the relationship with the outer world.”
Social atom repair can occur when the protagonist has had their support systems concretised and they are able to see they are not alone. The achievement of new role development can assist in social atom repair. Concretisation can uncover true feelings and this can lead the protagonist on the journey of new discovery. They are then able to see that their old way of responding is not serving them well. New progressive roles develop and social atom repair is achieved.
Description Of The Work

A Lasting Picture
The following is an example of how concretisation creates a lasting picture which, when recalled, assists the person to warm up to a progressive role state and then act from that place.

Amanda wants to leave an abusive relationship. She is unable to stay strong whenever she hears his repeated promises never to hit her again. She finds herself feeling sorry for him and the pull to go back to him is very strong. I invite her to concretise the situation and ask Amanda to look around the room and chose something that represents the amount that she does not want to be in this relationship. She quickly chooses the large table. Then I ask to choose something that represents how much she loves her partner. She again is very warmed up and quickly chooses a small jar and puts it down firmly on the desk. I then ask her to stand with me and tell me what she sees. She laughs and says it is very clear she does not want to be in this relationship.

The role test of her resolve to leave her partner came very soon after this session. Her partner phoned her and said he was sorry and that he wanted her back. This time her response was very different and she was able to act from a different place. By previously concretising the situation Amanda now had a strong mental picture, which acted as an effective warm up enabling her to enact the new and progressive role of the ‘self-protector’. The concretisation enabled her to believe in herself. She realised that her ‘small jar of love’ was not enough and that she did not want to return to an abusive relationship. Through the use of concretisation she was enlivened and her spontaneity was dramatically increased. The role of self-protector was only in its embryonic stage but even so she was able to stay confident, solid and firm in her decision. Before she had the experience of having her situation concretised she was easily persuaded because she did not have any resources to call on. She now had a resource which she had easy access to from within herself, the picture of the small jar. Concretisation is firstly a right side brain activity, in that it is primarily visual. When the right brain was activated through the use of concretisation then Amanda’s intuitive self was mobilized which gave her freedom to
explore new possibilities and become more creative in her approach to her problems. The left-brain came into play when she processed, analysed and reflected on what had occurred.

Later after this encounter Amanda saw me in the work place. I was some distance away from her when she yelled out to attract my attention. She lifted her arm in the air, waves her hand, and said, “little jar”. She then smiled, lifted her arm, clenched her hand, and punches the air with triumph. It was clear she had integrated a forward-moving approach to an old situation in her life.

**Expanding The System**
Next follows an example of how the use of concretisation expands the clients system and gives them an opportunity to gain a fresh perspective.

Susan wanted to explore her work situation where she was becoming increasingly frustrated. She felt that her employer was not hearing her and that her skills were not being utilized. I suggested we explore the nature of her relationships with each member of her work system.

*After Susan has drawn her work system I ask her to draw the nature of her relationship (‘tele’) with each person. She draws negative tele with all her bosses. I ask her if there is any one in the work system that she could work with. She says there is no one. I invite her to think outside the immediate network of relationships to consider if there is any one she could work with. She says yes, she has four colleagues who she has regular contact with. She draws each of them in and then the tele she has with each one. She has positive tele with each one. She is soon drawing and talking about how she could engage her colleagues to action change in her work place, the very reason she had wanted to explore her work system in the first place.*

In the example above, the flow of feeling that exists between Susan and her bosses and colleagues is concretised on paper in a visual form. What was abstract now has a concrete form on paper and Susan warms up to the role ‘change-agent’.
When the system is expanded through concretisation and all parts are seen in total, then what may have been hidden is now more fully displayed. What may have been vaguely perceived can now be observed clearly and in turn this energises, motivates and mobilises Susan to act new progressive roles. Before this system was concretised and expanded Susan was only able to access coping roles. When the situation was set out Susan was at first unable to see any support in her work system.

As the counsellor I hold the belief there is a larger system than that which has been displayed. I model spontaneity by encouraging the protagonist to concretise and expand the system on paper and then experience it. When the protagonist feels supported they are able to engage their thinking and spontaneity, which in turn allows new possibilities to be tried. Having her thinking visualized in a diagram of positive and negative relationships gave Susan a picture of the support in her work place that she was able to hold onto.

Back in her work place she no longer felt so alone knowing there are some colleagues that she can engage with and bounce ideas off. Her spontaneity was stimulated and she was able to activate progressive roles and become creative in a workplace that beforehand she was only just able to cope.

**Working Out What Was Going On**
In this example I show how concretisation can be used when trying to seek clarity when presented with a number of issues.

A client is very stressed with the problems she has at work. She has been trying to work out how to manage a number of issues and is becoming increasingly perturbed that she is unable to make any headway. The use of concretisation assists her to gain the clarity she is seeking.

*Bev is very stressed in her job and has been trying to nut out three problems, which have been going around and around in her head for days. I suggest that we concretise the three problems so we can get a clear picture of what is happening. Picking up a tissue box she names this as the first problem, the one that is giving her the most headaches. Bev then quickly picks up a large book and says this is the next one. She says she is not thinking*
about this one so much. She then gets a small jar for the last problem. She says this one is in her face. I then ask her to stand beside me and tell me what she sees. She looks and looks and then says:

Bev    How could I be so blind?
Joc    What do you mean?
Bev    Well look, what I have done? I have put out a large book twice the size of the tissue box and have said this one is not a problem. Who am I kidding?
Joc    So the tissue box problem was the one that was giving you the headaches?
Bev    Yes, right, number two is the issue and I have been trying not to look at it.
Joc    You can see it now that it is in front of you?
Bev    Yes I can, it is very clear now.

When we are trying to nut out problems in our head it is the left side of our brain that is mostly at work activating the logical, sequential, rational, analytical side of our thinking which looks at everything in parts. When Bev’s right side of her brain was triggered, the random, intuitive and holistic aspect of her functioning came into play. By using concretisation, the difficulties of her inner reality were suddenly uncovered. She was now able to act from a position of greater consciousness. Before her problems had been concretised she had been blinded into thinking that the issue that she had been spending so much time and energy on really was the most important to work on. Only when all three issues had been concretised did the scales fall off her eyes for her to see the reality of the situation. From this new position she was able to mobilize her spontaneity and act to bring to a close the situation, which had been causing her so much anxiety.

**The Bigger Picture**

When concretisation is used to develop the bigger picture for the protagonist new and under discovered feelings can be brought in to play. This example is of a client with whom I used drawing and the use of a line or ‘continuum’ to warm up to the experience she had with her husband.

*Nina is confused and upset at her reaction when her husband had given her an expensive and long wanted present. She was angry with her husband and was feeling resentful. She*
expressed confusion at her reaction, believing that she should feel grateful for the present. Clearly she did not and this makes her feel very angry now with herself. She is not sure whom she felt the most anger towards; to her husband or to herself. She is very conflicted.

I suggest she might be able to draw her inner conflict, rather than analyse the situation in her head. She draws the MP3 player that her husband had given her. She then draws herself in the picture. I ask her to add words to the picture. She adds words first to the MP3 player “small, cute, extravagant, unnecessary, expressive, loud, fun”. When I hold the picture back for her to see, she responds with “I feel that I am being bought off, I feel resentful”. I ask where in her body she feels the resentment she identifies her stomach. I ask her to put the resentment on the drawing of herself. She draws a small area of resentment on the figure of herself. I draw a continuum of 1-10 and ask her to identify the level of resentment she feels, one being for no resentment and ten being full of resentment. She picks up the crayon and floats it over the line having difficulty in where to put the line. She asks me again to explain the scale and again unsuccessfully attempts to place a mark with the crayon.

I take the drawing and hold it up for her to see. At this point she is able to put her mark on the scale. A large red six. We stand together and look at the drawing, I ask her what she sees. Her response is “I am not that resentful”.

I ask her to pick up the crayon and to just shade it over her tummy on the drawing. When she does this she writes a new word “guilt”. She returns to the scale and this time it is a nine. She said she did not know that guilt was there. We go on to explore what the guilt is about. [In a previous session we had explored her social and cultural atom. It had become clear that Nina had carried a lot of misplaced guilt about her parents’ unhappy marriage. Nina had been her mum’s sounding board from an early age when she had been told that men always buy your love.] When Nina’s husband gives her an extravagant gift these old values have come to the fore, believing that men are not to be trusted and she finds herself responding as her mother would have.

When Nina’s feelings were concretised she was able to see what feelings were hidden. This became a good educative process. Nina was able to see that resentment was not her true feeling. Before her feelings had been concretised Nina was unaware of her feelings of guilt. She felt safe with feeling resentful because this helped her to push people away. By utilizing both concretisation and maximization her right brain was stimulated, enabling the
obscure to be suddenly seen. By using the one to ten scale as an assessment tool Nina was able to gauge her feelings and see that she had been using resentment to stay safe.

When maximization was used, by getting her to shade over her drawing, she became aware of the fullness of her feelings and was able to identify her guilt. She required doubling to be able to face the truth of this. Until Nina had become aware of the underlying feelings she was always going to go back to the old and familiar patterns of responding. From her social atom she had developed the coping role of the ‘spoilsport’ so that whenever some one gave her something she was immediately on her guard defending against the expectation of being hurt. She would quickly come out with a remark that would leave the giver of the gift feeling rejected.

Inevitably this led the giver to also reject Nina in some way. She would then feel justified in feeling resentful. By having her feelings concretised Nina’s experience was one of surprise at the level of guilt she felt. As long as she continued to operate out of her left-brain she was able to rationalize and justify her feelings of resentment by blaming the other person. When her right brain was fully engaged and activated, through concretisation, her true feelings were able to be recognized and accepted.

**The Test**

Concretisation of the facts enables the protagonist to see all the issues relating to the problem and gives them much more information and knowledge than previously held notions. Previous decisions are revisited, evaluated and new choices can be made.

*Bill is having his annual health check with me when I find his lung function is down below the predicted levels. More tests are done and again his lung function comes below the expected levels. I wonder to myself “do I as the health professional give the talk about giving up smoking?”. Knowing that the ‘smoking is bad for you’ talk doesn’t work I ask him if there is a family history of lung disease. Bill reports that he has lost a number of his family to lung disease. As Bill starts to name his family members and their illnesses I pick up things on the table and lined them in front of him; dad who died of lung cancer, his uncle Sam who also died of lung cancer, his uncle Jim who had emphysema. At this point*
he then remembered his grandfather also had some lung disease but he was not sure what and now his older brother has just been diagnosed with emphysema. He looks at them for some time and then says, “It does not make a pretty picture”. He then asks me where he can get help to give up smoking.

Concretising the members of his family with lung disease enabled Bill to see the truth in all its stark realities and he was then able to act from his new understanding of himself and his family history. In this case the protagonist did not pick the items himself to represent his family members, it was the counsellor who used what was available yet this still had a great impact on him. He was able to see that his behaviour as a smoker was going to result in harming himself. He was able to activate his thinking and look to the future and ask for help.

It was a simple intervention but a very powerful one and a wonderful education tool. This intervention was so much better that the usual methods of educating the protagonist on the risks of smoking which so often results in pushing them away. The many warnings on cigarette packets, advertising even on buses have anaesthetised smokers to the dangers. When Bill was able to see the impact of smoking on his own family and on his own body he was able to initiate a new response.
**Discussion**

Concretisation can be very powerful and can take clients to a very deep level in a small amount of time and can be used in a variety of settings and situations. The right brain is activated when the client is setting things out in a physical form. The left-brain is then brought into the equation when they are processing the information that has been seen. Using the right-brain complements and extends the more common left-brain logical thinking and use of sequential actions.

Concretisation accesses the creative and wise unconscious parts of the client. When concretisation is used then the client is able to access new ways of functioning and new roles are developed. The visual dimension of concretisation enables the client to have a lasting picture which can then be accessed, thus giving them something to underpin and give strength to their role development. This is because concretisation allows the client to see and have a new, previously underdeveloped, way of thinking about an issue.

When thinking stays in the left-brain it usually stays compartmentalised and logical in nature. When this happens it can be hard to develop new ways of seeing and being in the world. However when the right-brain is put into action, the more creative abilities of the client can be accessed and acted upon and new roles can start to be developed. Moreno talks about the ‘creator within’. I believe that concretisation is a powerful tool that taps into the client’s spontaneity and creativity enabling them to access their own ‘creator’.

Concretisation seems a very simple intervention and its power to effect lasting change may not always have been appreciated. However, I have found it to be a very potent and useful technique in my work with clients to bring about social atom repair and progressive role development. Concretisation can be used to transform client issues into scenes on stage or paper. Metaphors can be converted into actualities, for example the ‘burden on the back’ can be visualised and experienced by a protagonist with a cushion or heavy object on their back.
Implications
Concretisation can help to translate statements about a client issue into something more tangible which can then be used to help develop the client’s role repertoire. It can be used in a vast number of settings and in a lot of different situations using every day props. Concretisation can be a very quick intervention, which often has profound effects on the people involved. It can be used in response to every day conversations and can be very quickly acted upon by the counsellor once they have a good understanding of how it can be used and its many applications.

Concretisation is an invaluable tool to have at the disposal of a counsellor or other health professional. Staff in any work place will often come to a counsellor in a stressed out state due to pressure of work, poor relationships with work colleges or difficult home situations. The counsellor often has limited time to work with these people because of the pressure of the work environment. Concretisation is a fast and effective way to work.

When people are stressed they predominantly use their left-brain to understand their situation. They try to rationalize and analyse the problem but this frequently leads to more stress, as they are unable to see the wood for the trees. Concretisation activates the right side of the brain, which enables a holistic and expansive way of looking at the whole picture. For the majority of people this has a calming effect and allows the person to access their ‘creator’. The left side of the brain is then activated and they are able to analyse the situation. This then allows them to bring into play all the roles they have at their disposal.

An important role in occupational health is that of the educator. Concretisation has a part to play in this role as well. Workplace seminars for stress management can often include the setting out of a person’s support system. If the health educator sets out their own support system first, they can model not only their own family and friends but also archetypes and activities that promote life. By setting out the educators own system or a system of a ‘typical worker’ participants are not overly exposed. By making the system as expansive as possible those clients with few people in their lives can orientate to generosity rather than deprivation. This use of concretisation assists the group to warm up in a non-threatening way.
When there is a lot of stress in the work place, relationships are often strained and people can find it hard to accommodate the different personalities around them. It can therefore be very helpful to educate them on why we sometimes find some people so irritating. Concretising a person’s network gives an opportunity to demonstrate the tele in relationships. This brings about discussion and leads to new understandings that our personalities do not always appeal to every one. Sometimes the issue has very little to do with us but has a lot to do with the other person, how they are reacting to us and what projections they put on us.

When working one-to-one in health education, concretisation can also make a significant contribution. In the example of the man whose lung function was below average concretisation was used very effectively. When the number of his relatives who had died or had significant health issues due to smoking was set out, the client was able to see that his smoking was a very dangerous pastime and he was consequently able to ask for help. What was maybe surprising in this case is that it was the counsellor who concretised the issues and not the client. In these situations the client will say if the counsellor has it wrong. Sometimes the counsellor can draw on a whiteboard what people are describing (i.e. the burden on their back). The client will usually take over from the counsellor or tell him/her what also needs to be there. When clients are describing their problems the counsellor can set out things to represent what the client is saying. The client will often take over or tell the counsellor what things to pick to represent what is being discussed.

Concretising can be client instigated or counsellor driven but both lead to the same outcome. Concretisation increases the warm-up to progressive roles and in some cases a major part of the work is achieved. Often this intervention is all that is required. In other situations it is just one of the many psychodramatic tools that can be used.
Conclusion

The use of concretisation activates every part of the protagonist’s mind. When a concern or problem is externalised and put into symbolic form the protagonist immediately has more information with which to develop a new perspective.

Concretisation can be used to transform general issues into scenes or for converting metaphors into concrete form, which then enables the protagonist to tap into their spontaneity and creativity.

When a practitioner understands the sequence of learning processes involved in concretisation they are more able to direct the protagonist to fully experience all that concretisation has to offer.

Concretisation often seems a very simple intervention and because of this I believe that it is easy to undervalue what it has to offer. I have found that whenever I have used concretisation in a timely way it has been a very potent and useful way to work with clients, work which has brought about social atom repair and progressive role development.
Bibliography


