

## Book review

Dramatherapy

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**Ethnodramatherapy: Integrating Research, Therapy, Theatre and Social Activism into One Method** by **Stephen Snow**. New York: Routledge, 2022. 328 pp., £31.99 (paperback), ISBN 9780367539474, £130.00 (hardback), ISBN 9780367539481, £22.39 (eBook), ISBN 9781003083818

‘Ethnodramatherapy’ (EDT) is divided into four sections: the background and development of what Snow names a ‘new method’, applications, ethics and philosophy, with a final section concerning the integration of research, therapy, theatre and social activism. Early in the book, a definition of ethnodramatherapy is offered as:

The preparation and performance of a play based on the study of the actions and thoughts of a group of people, with deeply shared common experiences, which aims to have a therapeutic effect on the individuals in the group. (p. 4)

But this is only a starting point. Diverse, lively and lucid, ‘Ethnodramatherapy’ allows us to follow its journeys along many different roads to arrive at the place of that definition (the chapters on background and development) and many others that run away and play with it (the rest of the book).

The text is driven by different kinds of momentums, and reading it is to be drawn into them. They all concern *discovery*: from accounts concerning research into different applications to Snow’s analysis of the energy unleashed as aspects of research, theatre and therapy interact to form ‘Ethnodramatherapy’. There are two of these kinds of momentums that I will comment on within this review: that of the personal journal of Snow reflecting on his own experiences as a researcher and therapist, and that created by the book’s advocacy of the dramatherapist changing how they work and, in a sense, who they are.

Winfield (2022), in an article published around the same time as ‘Ethnodramatherapy’, talks about being an ethnographer in a way that could have been commissioned to describe the journey which Snow’s book maps: ‘an iterative process that continues throughout one’s career across multiple field sites as one learns more about oneself, the world, and how to best care for other human beings’ (p. 157). This is a book rich in detail of lived experiences and learning about self, others and care over time. For example, the ‘Applications’ chapters take us into ‘the unique voices of the informants’ (p. 69) of female adolescents in youth protection, caregivers of ‘loved ones with a mental illness’ and a ‘community orientated project’ on mental health. There are many creative ideas on offer – relating to designing and implementing versions of methods such as interviews, focus groups or arts-based enquiry. However, this is all made especially *alive* by the act of Snow taking stock. Reading the book felt like spending time with many fascinating projects, theoreticians, researchers and participants: all analysed with thought and emotion by a skilled and able director, therapist, teacher and social activist.

As the book closes, Snow uses the metaphor of ‘wearing four hats at once’ (p. 272), with each hat relating both to a role and its discipline. The multiple hats wearing is an image that will reflect the experiences of many arts therapists, given that the profession is inherently interdisciplinary. What will be less familiar, and is part of the value of this book, is the introduction of one which changes how the others are worn. To the hats many drama therapists will be familiar with – those of theatre, therapy and research – Snow adds that of the ‘guide (social activist)’, which he connects to ‘leading the process towards realizing the end goals of social change’ (p. 272). In her recent argument about re-appraising ethnography and research, Reyes (2020) throws challenges to researchers concerning identity and methodology. Developing our understanding of the nature and practice of reflexivity, central to much qualitative research such as ethnography, she proposes the notion of an ‘ethnographer toolkit’. Reyes (2020) describes it as ‘thinking about the ways in which our social positions, or positionality, shapes our entrance, interactions, and conversations’ (p. 221) within research. She advocates that

our bodies, racial/ethnic identities, gender, sexuality, appearance, backgrounds, education, citizenship, and social networks, among others, all matter and are used to gain access and understand the field. The ethnographic toolkit highlights how these traits shape the ways we view the world and the ways in which the world views us. (p. 225)

Snow’s chapters explore these issues well, richly demonstrating their values in how the dramatherapist can wear this ‘guide (social activist)’ hat (p. 272), reflecting on themselves and their ethnodramatherapy work. Concepts of identity, emancipation, oppression and empowerment, for example, are thoughtfully explored in relation to areas such as impact, ethics and participatory action research in dramatherapy.

To return to Winfield (2022), she advocates ‘a slow and deliberate scholarship, in which one might have to change course–midway, rather than a race through the research to publish’ (p. 156). This book is an illustration of the value of such scholarship. The writing pays attention to experiences and insights gained over many years and takes us through many of Winfield’s ‘changes of course’, as Snow moves between disciplines. He journeys in multiple directions but these are never digressions. They form a combination of intuitive and intellectual curiosity and path trailing. The move towards the unitary, indicated in the book’s title ‘Into One Method’, is not a reduction of the complex into some over-simplified technique. It is a clear communication of a framework for ethnodramatherapy philosophy, theory and practice developed in slow time.

Phil Jones

Professor of Children’s Rights and Wellbeing, Head of Research, Department of Learning and Leadership, University College London, Institute of Education  
phil.jones@ucl.ac.uk

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