

Mobilising The Believer in The Creative Genius

by Kaye Keam

As a Psychodramatist, practicing artist and arts educator in Perth, WA, Kaye works on a wide range of community arts and cultural development projects involving people of all ages and stages. She is passionate about creating a better world for young people who are obviously 'at risk'. This article, based on her psychodrama thesis, explores how and why the role of the creative genius has such a positive impact on social and cultural atom development.

From my own experience, the mirroring and modelling of the unconditional, generous and protective aspects of the *creative genius* serves humanity as the single most powerful intervention that instantly promotes healthy functioning. There is no doubt that when the role of *the believer* in self and others is unexpressed in the social and cultural atom, the subject is psychologically and socially at risk. In my work I set out to maintain a focus on the importance of the creative genius by taking up the role of *the believer in the creative genius*. I have seen first hand how learning comes about through the functioning of this role.

Over the past five years, as a Psychodramatist and practicing artist I have worked on a number of projects that are part of an innovative education program in the Perth outer metropolitan area. This program was set up to assess and address some far-reaching community issues related to young people who are

identified as psychologically and socially at risk. It is these young people who, unless adequate interventions are made at an early enough stage in their development, are at risk of slipping through the educational and cultural net and all too often become the social system rejectees who terrorise society.

The following case study illustrates that once *the believer* was activated in the context of the inner world of the protagonist, he was also able to change his situation within his family system, the wider school system and far beyond. At the time I began working with Liam he was twelve years old, on the verge of being expelled and was considered by staff to be 'the worst person in the school'. After some negotiation with his school, Liam joined a mural project group to work with me for a two-week trial period. Because there was a marked difference in his behaviour in this setting, he was given permission to stay in the group for the following three

months. During this period although staff members witnessed a different Liam while on the project, the same old dynamics were still operating outside of the group and I was eventually asked to work with him on a one-to-one basis over four-weeks.

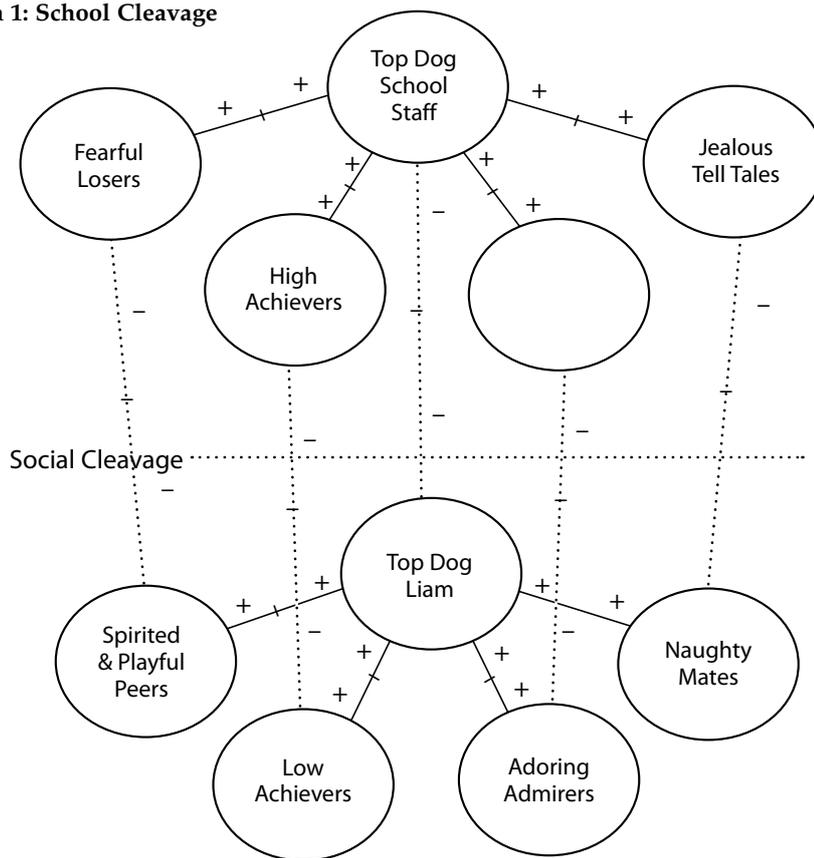
threaten him with suspension, nor isolate him by sending him out of the classroom. They understood this was necessary to help change the inter-relational dynamics between staff and student. This period became known as 'lay off Liam month'. We began one-to-one sessions in the following way.

Liam's position within the wider school system is summarised in the following diagram. Liam was in the 'top dog' position in relation to his peers as shown on the bottom half of the diagram, although he was 'the under dog' in relation to the rest of the school.

First Session with Liam

At the first session Liam experienced himself as being in a no-win, hopeless situation. I asked if he meant his situation at school, or with his friends or at home. He told me he meant his situation everywhere, particularly

Diagram 1: School Cleavage



I negotiated an agreement with the school staff that they would not single Liam out for punishment during this period, not

at home. I produced a large piece of paper and some coloured felt pens and said "Lets

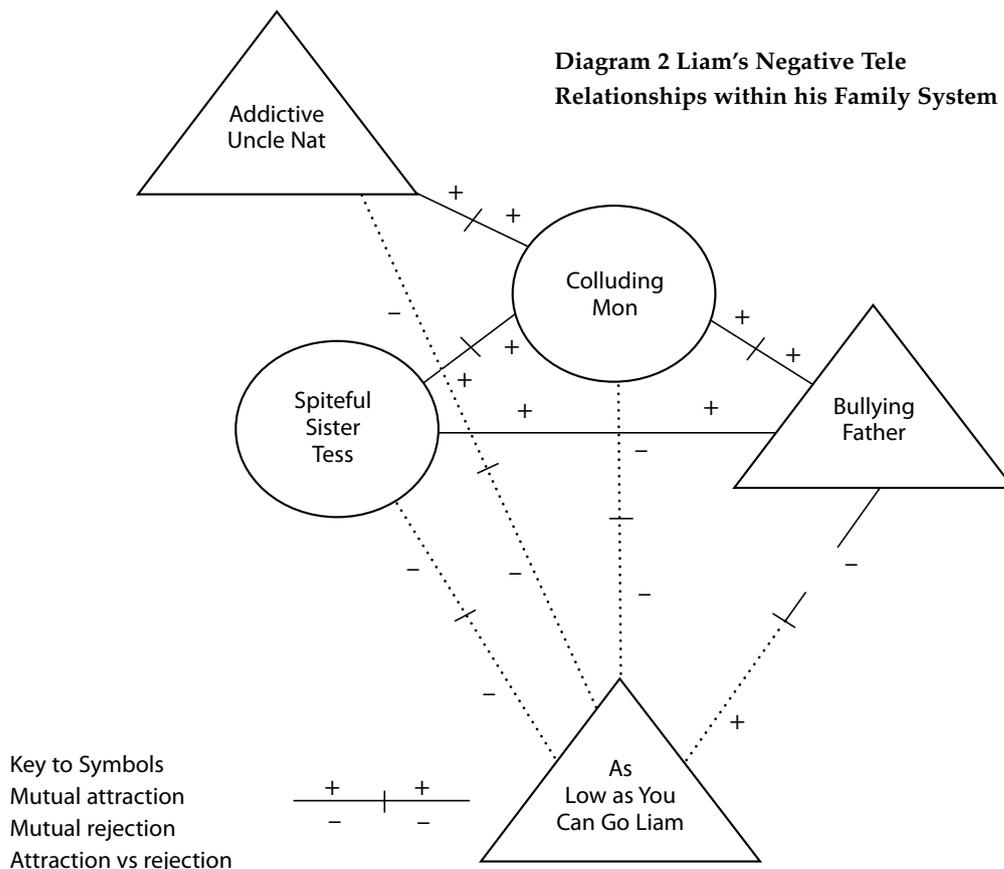
make a map of your family so we can have a peek into your world to see what we can find." I then inquired where he was on this map and he replied, "I'm as low as you can go". With some coaching about male and female symbols, he placed his name in a triangle at the very bottom of the sheet. I asked him who else was there and person-by-person he set out his family system.

I suggested that we map the family first by putting the people he lives with on paper and then we would include others who are also important family members. He started off placing his father and his sister, Tess, both of whom he said hated him. Tess is two years older than Liam. I asked if his father works and he said "he works for himself, he is not around very often, he goes to work

early and sometimes spends evenings with his mates". I asked, "who looks after you" and he replied, "Mon is there, well she's there most of the time except when she's in hospital". He told me that Mon goes into the psychiatric ward at one of the main hospitals every now and then. I asked what was wrong with her and he said, "Oh I don't know, she just goes crazy sometimes but I don't know the name of her illness". He explained that Mon was not his mother but his maternal grandmother.

Liam's mother (Mon's daughter) went interstate with another man when he was six years of age (not surprisingly the age of his first suspension from school) and he rarely has contact with her. Although she is fifteen

Diagram 2 Liam's Negative Tele Relationships within his Family System



years his senior, Mon became his father's live-in partner after his mother left. Mon has four children of her own, two daughters and two sons, one of whom is Nat aged 27, a heroin addict and a chain smoker. When Nat was around he shared or rather took over Liam's bedroom. Liam hated Nat being there, he smoked in the room all night and Mon made Liam sleep on a lumpy mattress on the top bunk while Nat slept in his bed. These were the people who lived in the house and from whom Liam felt very isolated as shown in the diagram on the previous page.

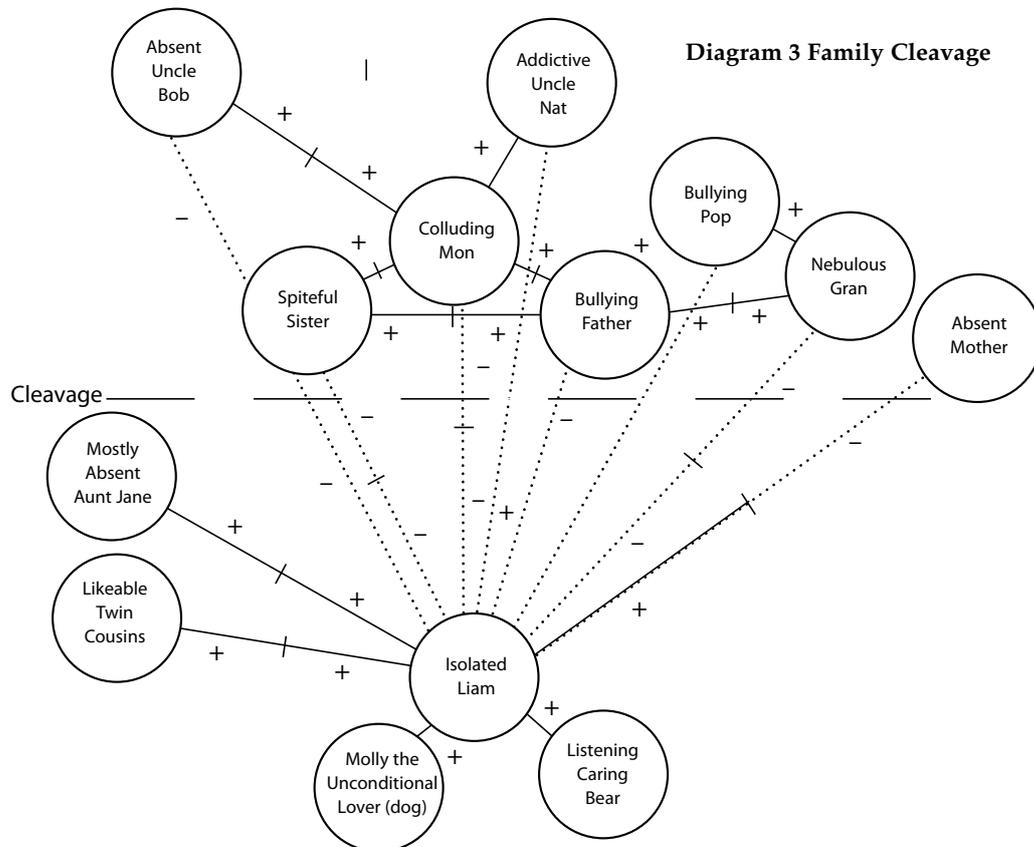
Liam went on to extend the family system to include significant others. He didn't like Pop who was the next to be put on the map. Pop was in the army before he retired. He was described as a loud bully and he used to belt Dad when he was a boy. Liam believed that was why his Dad belted him; he was a bully too. I asked whether Pop belted Liam and he responded with "he used to but not lately, I don't see them as often as I did when I was little". I added, "Well you are so tall and strong now, perhaps Pop respects your strength" and he shrugged. Next on the map was Gran, Pop's wife who didn't say much, she just went along with what Pop wanted. Liam was indifferent towards her. Next was Aunt Jane, Mon's other daughter who has twin boys Bill and Dan. Liam liked them especially Jane who seemed to be the only one who stuck up for Liam, but they live in a country town and hardly ever came to the city. Uncle Bob is Mon's son and Nat's brother and he and his family never came to see Liam's family. Liam felt rejected by this branch of the family also. Liam perceived that apart from Jane and her sons, everybody hated him and that he was the family problem; he was always in trouble. Tess and Mon colluded against him and when Dad came home Mon told Dad about Liam's behaviour, then Dad gave Liam another

belting. When Nat was around every one was on edge and he got all Mon's attention. I asked Liam if he hated them in return and he replied, "I sometimes feel a bit angry with them but I don't hate them, I don't hate anyone really". I suggested, "Perhaps you hate some of the things these people do and the way they act towards you eh?" He nodded and I reassured him that that was quite OK.

I said "Liam I understand why you see your situation as hopeless. There is certainly not much joy in your world the way it is at the moment. I am wondering about your Mum, you haven't placed her here on the map, where will she be in relation to you?" He deliberated then placed her out to the right. I asked, "Would you like to make a little drawing near your mother to show how you feel about her?" He spontaneously drew a red heart. I said, "You love your Mum don't you?" and he nodded. "Do you think she loves you?" He responded immediately, "No, she doesn't love me, she left me and anyhow she now has two younger children that she loves instead". I said, "How very painful it is to feel so unloved, abandoned and isolated from your mother" and I saw some sadness come into his face. "You are a sad and lonely young person, it is very painful for you". He warmed up a little more to the feeling and eventually he welled up with tears. I encouraged him to feel this feeling and let the tears come. He said, "I haven't cried since I was about seven and it is not comfortable". I touched his arm as I handed him a tissue and said "This is a beautiful expression of you which has been hidden for a long time. I guess you have had to be very brave". There was a pause then I continued, "You know it is a good thing to cry, it helps to relieve some of the pain". He allowed the tears to come then we were silent for a while until he was ready to move on.

Liam took a couple of deep breaths, he was looking softer around the face and his body was more relaxed. I asked him what he did to comfort himself when things got to be really bad at home. He responded, "I go down the back garden to a special place and I write." I said "Do you really? That's a great thing to do. I suppose you write how mean and miserable everyone is towards you?" He said, "No, I write poetry". "Oh you are a creative poet!" I was pleasantly surprised and delighted and told him that writing poetry was an excellent way to comfort himself. He offered to bring in his book to show me some of the poems he had written. I said it would be a privilege to have him share his writing with me and that I looked forward to seeing it at our next session. He warned me that the book was a bit messy with some smudgy marks all over

it. I assured him "That's OK, I don't mind smudges, I am more interested in what you write". He went on to say that his dog was the cause of the smudging. "She has a wet nose and she licks me while I am writing and sometimes she puts her dirty paws on the pages". I was amused, "Well I am very glad to know you have a dog. What's her name?" He said her name was Molly, she was a bitser. I said "You know Liam, a dog can be the most wonderful unconditional lover, no matter how mad or sad or bad you are, the dog still wags its tail and keeps on loving you". I asked him whether anything or anyone else loved him in this way and he said he had an old well worn bear that he has had since he was a baby. He sometimes hugged the bear and secretly told him his woes. I said "Well these two great friends belong on your map too," and he placed



them either side of himself at the bottom. We established that no matter how bad he was made out to be in the family and at school, and no matter what he said and did, he was never judged nor rejected by the bear and the dog. They knew he didn't set out to make trouble, and Liam knew he was 'not all bad'. This gave us a good base upon which to build, for it seemed there was little joy elsewhere in his disturbed and troubled life. The dog and the bear were the closest elements to him on his family map as shown on the previous page.

At the end of the first session Liam was clearly relieved and said, "No one has ever taken an interest in me and my life before". I explained that although he could not change the people around him, he was working with me to explore his own way of being and that he had already developed some new ways of relating with others. I pointed out "We are trotting along really well and making some good progress with some great tools in the saddlebags and even though you may not be aware yet, some significant changes are already happening". Hearing this he brightened up and left the session with some new insights about himself and his world.

Analysis of Liam's Social and Cultural Atom After the First One-to-One Session

At the beginning of this session Liam felt hopelessly resigned in his situation in the school system. After all he had been the school 'scapegoat' for years. However because the school staff were supporting the work Liam and I were doing, it was clear that he was not totally isolated and rejected by the school system at this point in time. In relation to the playground bullying Liam was the 'top dog' in the pecking order within his group of friends, therefore he did have an experience of being 'looked up to' in this

group even though it may have been for dubious reasons.

In his social and cultural atom there is a clear social cleavage between Liam and the rest of the immediate family or social atom (as shown in Diagram 3). However Liam does have mutually positive tele connections with his aunt Jane and her twins even though they were absent most of the time. He indicated that he felt supported by them at some level and knowing this, there was some hope in the system fairly early in the mapping process. In addition the self-caring role of the creative poet emerged and was strongly connected to Molly the dog and his teddy bear. These positive aspects of Liam's cultural atom or internal world indicated that they would be highly important in future social and cultural atom work. The development of these roles is strongly influenced by the emerging positive tele with the Psychodramatist in the role of *the believer in the creative genius*.

As a group member within the project group Liam had given up the 'disruptive bad boy' roles and had emerged as the sociometric star among this group of peers. Here he reflected capable and responsible leadership roles and there was no cleavage. Again, due to my enactment of the role of *the believer in the creative genius*, the dynamics had shifted. The focus was now based on the inclusive and protective elements of the system, rather than the isolating and punishing factors in both the family and school systems.

Clinically it was important that Liam was able to express some of the grief and loss from being abandoned by his mother at six years of age. This demonstrated that he had not shut his emotions down completely. If his emotions had been completely shut down it would have suggested greater cause for

concern. Following his expression of grief and sadness he began to see himself as a 'not all bad me' and as a participant in the mural group a 'good me'. Liam was in fact, a well-meaning person, who did not return hatred towards those he perceived to hate him.

Second Session with Liam

Liam brought along his poems and shyly agreed to read out his favourites. I was extremely touched by the heartfelt beauty, warmth and wisdom reflected in these works. They were very personal and Liam was highly sensitive about the possibility of being exposed and shamed within the still inhospitable family and school systems. I encouraged him to keep writing and reinforced how positive, creative and healing his poetry writing was. I emphasised that it was a very special and powerful attribute that reinforced his own integrity, something no one else could ever take away, no matter what happens into the future.

I inquired about Liam's home situation. I was interested to explore Liam's relationships with family members further to see what possibilities there were for making some meaningful interventions. I had a hunch that the relationship between Liam and his father was the best place to start since Liam had a positive tele towards his father, even though in our first one-to-one session he perceived that his father hated him, as did other family members.

I stood up and moved into an open space and said "Liam come across here and be your Dad, stand how he stands and act exactly how he acts". He sauntered over to where I was and I said, "Hello Mr Green, what's your first name, and how old are you?" He slouched with his left shoulder leaning against the wall, right hand on his

hip and said in a lowish drawl, "My name is Dave and I'm thirty six". I said, "Can I see your hair going a little bald up here?" pointing to his head. He said "No I'm not going bald". He was indignant, "I have long hair and wear it in a pony tail". I continued, "Well I wasn't right about your hair was I? You seem proud of your long hair, you are not losing it." He smiled. I continued, "Now, it's Wednesday morning Dave, I guess you are at work so what are you wearing today?" He replied, "Yeah, I'm in my work shorts, boots and blue singlet. It's hot." I continued the warm up and found that Dave was about six foot three, he had a bushy beard, tattoos on his upper arms and people thought he looked like a bikie, which was a bit of a family joke.

I directed Liam to come and stand near me and be himself again and I reiterated a few of the words he as his father Dave had said. Then I suggested that Liam tell his father what he likes about him. "I like it when you take me fishing but it doesn't happen very often". "Fishing" I said, "sounds good. Where do you go?" "We go to the beach". When Liam and his father went fishing it was the only time they were ever alone together and they enjoyed themselves. They ate pies and drank coke and were good fishing mates. They didn't talk much other than about the fish they caught and sometimes they didn't catch any. I said, "How about you suggest going fishing this weekend, and see what happens". He did that and I reversed him into the role of Dad again. In the role of his father he said he was too busy to go fishing this weekend, he had too much work on (at this point he is in the role of the *unavailable busy rejector*). He paused to think for a while and then added, "I'll see if we can make it next weekend". I acknowledged his change of heart and said, "I am glad you are willing to make some

time to be with Liam”.

While still in the role of Dad I wanted to encourage some more positive connections between father and son so I went on, “Now Dave, over here is Liam” and I put out an empty chair. “Why don’t you tell him what you like about him as your only son.” He was still slouching against the wall, “Yeah I like fishing with you too”. I said, “Yes, he’s a good fishing mate.” He nodded. “What else do you like about Liam?” “Oh you’re not such a bad kid, you are pretty smart and have a good sense of humour”. As producer, I agreed with him, “Liam is intelligent and has a good sense of humour, and when he is not made into ‘the family problem’ and the ‘problem student’ at school, he is a very different person.” I continued with conviction, “You know Dave, when Liam is participating in the mural project group, his skills and ability shine through. It’s important that you know about this, Dave. He is a very capable and likeable young fellow”. Liam as Dave heard this clearly. Liam reversed roles to be himself again and I added, “Your father does recognise some good things about you and that’s important to know. You need to let him know more about yourself and the good things you do”.

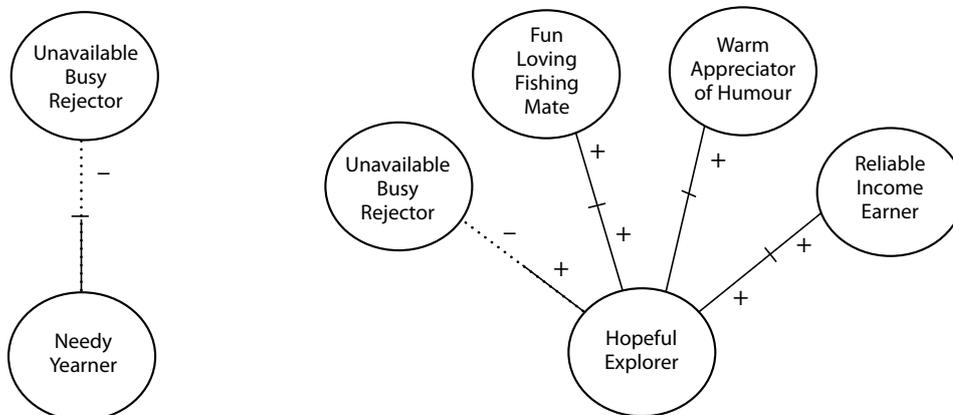
I coached Liam to tell his father about his recent achievements in the mural project group. Initially he was shy and awkward about expressing himself positively. He was not used to presenting himself in this way. We moved back to the table where we mapped the interaction between Liam and his father. Diagram 4 maps the relationship that emerged between Liam and his father in this session.

Analysis of the Second One-to-One Session

The first half of this session began with Liam in the role of the creative poet who shyly read his favourite works out loud. There was humility in this new way of being and he protected himself by negotiating with me not to share his poetry with anyone else. The theme for several of the poems he wrote was about celebrating the life of the child. They were positive and very moving and showed a certain sensitivity that allowed me to assess Liam’s inner world as basically resilient and quite rich.

The dysfunctional relationship with his father from session one is shown on the left of Diagram 4. Here in the old stuck

Diagram 4 Map of Liam’s Relationship with his Father
Liam and his Father in session 1. Liam and his Father in Session 2.



or conserved and closed system he was a *needy yearner* in relation to the *unavailable busy rejector*. After the role reversal with his father in session two there was positive tele between Liam who became the *hopeful explorer* and the cluster of the three roles of the *reliable income earner*, *fun loving fishing mate* and *warm appreciator of humour*. To assist him to understand more about his relationships with his father and

others I put objects out on the table showing that when Liam is resigned in the role of the school or family problem, the dynamics become stuck in the same old rut where he is rejected or made the scapegoat. Liam was now able to recognise when this happened and he learnt that he had the power to function from more positive roles and therefore change his situation.

I spoke to Liam about the way we were working in the mural group and he was able to recognise that he was not the scapegoat, nor the problem student, nor the family problem in this setting. When he was able to shift his position to other roles such as *the thoughtful and competent contributor*, *valued team player*, *the self believer*, *spontaneous planner*, *manageable bright button* and *creative poet*, his world changed. He became aware that while he could not change other people, he did have the power and the ability to change himself and in doing so, the dynamics in the system shifted. To complete the session, I informed Liam that the staff had agreed to make some changes in the way they would relate with him over the next month and I asked him to monitor both his and their progress during this period.

Third and Fourth Sessions - Monitoring the Progress

Liam had been fishing with his father since our last session and they had a great time catching herring off some rocks. He also reported positive developments in his relationships with Mon and other family members. Instead of continuing the old pattern of reacting adversely to various issues as they arose he was developing the role of *responsible problem solver* that would assist him in maintaining a more positive relationship. In particular we worked on how he would resolve disagreements about caring for his dog.

At school Liam noticed a marked difference in the way he was being related to, even though he had been sent to the Principal once for clipping someone's ear. On this occasion he was able to speak for himself and say what had happened. While his physical action was not appropriate, he had been provoked and the other person was brought in to state his position in the matter. The issue between the two was adequately resolved and they both apologised for their respective actions. Liam appreciated that the incident was not blown up into a big issue with the threat of being suspended or worse, and with hindsight he was able to articulate other ways he could have dealt more appropriately with the situation.

I coached him to help concretise his new functioning now that he had come to realise that he was capable of initiating changes with seemingly little effort. Apart from a few insignificant incidents that were easily dealt with along the way, the progress during this period proved highly successful and the dynamics within both Liam's family and the school system were transformed.

Table 1: Role System of Liam after the Fourth One-to-One Session

PROGRESSIVE ROLES		COPING ROLES			FRAGMENTING ROLES	
Well Developed	Developing	Moving Toward	Moving Away	Moving Against		
Creative Poet		Hopeful Explorer		Defiant & Bullying Top Dog	Persecuted Victim	Sad
High Achieving Student		Shy and Humble Self-discloser		Insolent Slouch	Resigned Scapegoat	
				Disruptive Attention Seeker	Lonely Unloved Orphan	
				(These roles now little used)	Needy Yearner	
					Passive Aggressive Agitator	

The role system of Liam after the fourth one-to-one session is shown in Table 1 above.

Ongoing Progress and a Glimpse Into the Future

We finally completed the very colourful mural project we had been working on over the three month period, which was a great success and much celebrated. However it was the transformation in Liam's social and cultural atom that stood out as the most significant aspect of the work. Liam's leadership qualities that had emerged during the mural project continued to develop and by then he was obviously very popular

with his peers. He continued to write beautiful poetry, some of which he was now presenting in class and his attitude and abilities as an above average student were well established. He responded favourably to the ongoing encouragement from his teachers and developed a cluster of adequate roles through which to relate well with his friends and significant staff within the larger school system. Liam was no longer reactive and his self-esteem had blossomed. He had also carefully crafted improved relationships in his family system and his aura was noticeably different from when I first met him.

The last time I heard about Liam was in August 2003 when I was out shopping and ran into the woman who creatively initiated the 'at risk' program back in 1999. She was thrilled to tell me that his current school proudly acknowledges Liam as "a student of outstanding ability". It is lovely to know that Liam is well on his way in the world as a *believer* in his own *creative genius*.

A number of key moments in Liam's development stood out during our one-to-one sessions:

- In the first session Liam was touched by the fact that someone he could trust was showing a positive interest in him and his life situation.
- In the second session the roles of the *needy yearner* and *persecuted victim* diminished after Liam reversed roles with his father.
- As a result of the third session Liam's creative artist was concretised through the reading of his poetry where he was in the role of the *shy and humble self-discloser*. Later in this session he developed the role of the *motivated, responsible problem solver* in relation to caring for his dog.
- During the fourth session Liam's excellent report on his progress in the role of the *respectful, clear-seeing monitor* was revealed.
- Liam's awareness that he could not change others but that he does have the power to change his own position in relation to others, began to emerge early in the first group session where he started to believe in himself. This was reinforced

by the constant mirroring and modelling of the role of the *believer in the creative genius* throughout the process of the work we did together.

- When Liam functioned out of his newly developing healthy roles, the old scapegoating dynamics were transformed and his sociometric position changed from negative to positive.

Therapeutic Reflections

Without the role of the *believer in the creative genius* somewhere in their social and cultural atom a person is incapable of sustaining intimacy in relationship at any level. Being in the role of the *believer in the creative genius*, the psychodramatist is able to function with integrity in the purest form of co-creation, co-existence and co-production. The psychodramatist has the ability to operate out of the unconditional and self-preserving protective energy of the role of the *believer in the creative genius* when interpreting the body language and actions presented by the protagonist. The thinking aspect of this role resonates with a knowing awareness of the creative potential within the self, the protagonist and all of the group members at any given moment. The feeling aspect of the role is experienced as a 'spark' that creates a different vision from the conserved dynamics of the closed system. The actions facilitated by the role of the *believer in the creative genius* reflect clearly visible positive change in functioning. Instantly new life and vitality emerge.

Kaye can be contacted on email at: kkeam@optusnet.com.au