

Book review

Collage as a creative coaching tool: A comprehensive resource for coaches and psychologists

Andréa Watts
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Reviewed by Jonathan Passmore

THIS NEW title by Andréa Watts joins an emerging area of practice which I might categorise as ‘Arts based coaching’ (ABC) where the coach uses creative approaches as the main or primary framework for the coaching conversation. Examples includes Anne Sheather’s excellent book, ‘Coaching Beyond Words’ on art in coaching, Stephanie Wheeler and Teresa Leyman’s work on creativity and playfulness, Theresa Quinn’s and my own work on Lego Serious Play, Julie Flower’s work on improv and Alex Burns’s work using nature and the natural environment as ‘coaching space’ and metaphor to frame and explore personal experiences.

Andréa Watts’ focus is on collage as a media for developing new insights about oneself and the system. As she notes, collage draws on a range of other interconnected disciplines or techniques including psychology, creativity, storytelling, metaphor and mindfulness, and she draws on this multiplicity of disciplines in this work, making it an engaging read for psychologists.

The first section of the book provides the context. Andréa explores the nature of collage, its connection to other techniques and approaches, as well as the history of its development, alongside that of mark

making. What was interesting was the exploration between story boards, primarily being a representation of future goals or aspirations, and ‘collage coaching technique’ developed by Watts. My assumption as a reader was these would be one and the same, but Watts’s development of collage has moved the tool for a simple representation of future plans into a deeper psychological space, allowing for an exploration of the unconscious and sense making. In doing so, this moves the technique from a simple although engaging process to one where the skills of the psychologist, combined with a coach, can really come to the fore.

The second section focuses primarily on applying the collage technique to the coaching conversations. What’s nice in the book is the wide range of examples, case studies and stories which Andréa used to illustrate the approach and the power of the unique approach she has developed.

The final section offers practical guidance to the coach, helping the reader to think about how they might draw from the well of Andréa’s experience and use the book as a practical resource to enhance and develop their own coaching practice.

What is unusual about ‘Collage as a creative coaching tool’ is Watts’s ability



to move seamlessly between her model and its underpinning psychological theory. The book explores a wide range of different theoretical models which inform her model, but of particular interest was Zaltman's Metaphorical Elicitation Technique (ZMET), which made me reflect on my own practice and what I might draw from Andréa Watts's and Gerald Zaltman's work. I was fascinated by the links made to neuroscience and the role that collage can play as a tool to explore the unconscious. It is this aspect of the integration of psychological theory and innovative practice which I found both original and a step forward into how arts based coaching practice can add to coaching psychology.

A further feature of the book which I enjoyed was its unusual inclusion of multiple examples of collages reproduced

in colour. The use of these images helped Watts to both explore the work of her clients in the text and explain how these ideas can contribute to our work as practitioners.

While I'm not an artist, and have only rarely used ABC with clients, the book stimulated me to think again about the role of art and creative mediums in coaching conversation. I wonder how the diverse techniques such as collage, Lego Serious Play, and wider creative techniques can be integrated into coaching psychology practice to widen and diversify the work we do with clients and reduce the reliance on language, allowing for other forms of communication which some clients may both enjoy or prefer.

Jonathan Passmore
j.passmore@henley.ac.uk