

Carol Ann Lloyd¹
University of Chichester, Institute of Education Social
and Life Sciences
Chichester, United Kingdom

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DREAMING AT SCHOOL: A QUALITATIVE DEPTH PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH PROJECT ON SHARING DREAMS²

Abstract

Carl Jung's 1936-1940 discrete seminars and post-Jungian studies provide a compelling insight into the significance of children's dreams and the child archetype in the development of the unconscious. An extensive analytical literature review of existing research into children's dreams and the analysis of the phenomenological view of dreaming and sharing dreams within a British school context indicated that children's dream experiences are underutilised in primary education. The qualitative research project aimed to analyse the children's voices, perceptions, and experiences of sharing sleep dreams within an epistemological, psychosocial, and Jungian perspective. This phenomenological perspective on the oneiric dreams of children living in the 21st century across the world augments discourse concerning the relevance of Jung in contemporary pedagogy. As dreaming is a universal human function, it is worth widening the discourse on the sharing of dreams in schools within the context of socialist childhoods, arguing that this project's findings can be transposed as a valid pedagogical approach. In the empirical study, 22 children shared their dreams in six adapted social dream matrices and creative activities hosted by this researcher, followed by individual interviews with the researcher. The matrices were analysed with a focus on psychoanalytical and educational perspectives. Of the 22 interviews, a sample of eight were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Findings from the children's perceptions and voices about sharing their inner worlds

¹ email: c.lloyd@chi.ac.uk

² N. B. A higher education module blueprint was designed by the researcher as part of the PhD study, advocating how the social dream matrix approach could be integrated into infant and primary teacher training which values the child's voice, the unconscious, and progressive teaching. Ethics approval and consent to participate: Ethical Approval for the PhD research thesis was consented from the University of Essex (2020).

in the context of an educational environment concluded that sharing good and scary dreams in school time was a positive experience and they wished it could continue.

Keywords: Social Dreaming, Children's Voices, Pedagogy, Jung, Phenomenological.

Introduction

This empirical PhD research project into children's dreams was explored from psychosocial and psychoanalytical perspectives. The research explored children sharing the recollection of their oneiric dreams within an English school context and what they had to say about the experiences of a Dream Time project implemented by the researcher. The term 'sleep dreams' refers to oneiric experiences. The research considered, through the lens of the participants of a small-scale qualitative Dream Time project and an extensive literature review, whether sharing children's dreams is feasibly valuable and worthy of being placed within a child's educational experience. The argument in this paper contends that dreaming is a universal human phenomenon, therefore transferable to the Western and current Eastern European movement towards progressive ideas of pedagogical thinking. As in line with Blagojević and Dimitrijevic who argue that a radicalization of socialism necessitates the inclusion of "minor voices, narratives, and histories, as well as archives and realities that are forgotten and restrained" (79 cited in Novakov-Richey, 2020, p. 53).

This article argues the narrative of the child's inner dream worlds brings children as active agents in pedagogical studies.

The perspective of dreaming, sharing dreams in a group, child development, and English pedagogy, all examined from a psychosocial, psychoanalytical, and phenomenological psychology, provided the core conceptual framework. The research project focused on the practice of dream sharing in groups within the school context and argued that the study of the unconscious, with a focus on dreams as a valuable human phenomenon, is an applicable resource within pedagogical discourses. The research examined whether children's dream sharing in school from a child's phenomenological stance can be validated. Distinctively, the thesis held a discussion on the tensions held between Jungian analytical views of child development, holistic education, and entrenched English pedagogical theory. However, as Semetsky (2013, p. 1) stated in the introduction to *Jung and Educational Theory*, "as will be seenthe absolute line of division between educational and clinical aspects with regard to Jung's conceptualisation is no longer feasible." The terms 'holistic education' and 'Jungian holistic education' can therefore be used interchangeably and refer to the historical philosophy and perspective of an 'inclusive, non-reductive' approach to the 'philosophy of educational theory', the latter considers the unconscious (Semetsky, 2013, p. 1).

The researcher and author of this paper is English, lives and works in England, is a trained and experienced early years teacher, is a higher education lecturer in counselling and childhood studies and is a somatic and expressive arts psychotherapist. Involved professionally in both clinical and educational contexts, past and present, the researcher's bias is openly affirmative towards the view of merging Jungian theory to pedagogy as examined in Neville (2005), Mayes (2005), Main (2008), Semetsky (2013), Jones et al. (2008), and Adams (2014). All argue for a move towards Jungian holistic education. This researcher aimed to contribute new knowledge to the existing research on children's perceptions of their inner dream worlds through an innovative, small-scale, qualitative action research Dream Time project specifically undertaken within an English state infant and primary school, but considers this to be applicable to the developing Eastern European movement in progressive pedagogy and teacher training, therefore re-imagining socialist childhood narratives from the depths of the unconscious.

To clarify the contextual rationale for the phenomenological research project being placed within the English educational system, the researcher raises the concerning findings from extensive qualitative research undertaken by UNICEF (2007a) into childhood and adolescent wellbeing. Results highlighted that across 21 of the world's richest countries the wellbeing of British children ranked bottom of the league, Hungary and Czech Republic were rated slightly higher but included in the bottom range. This finding, analysed from the data of children's voices, raised some disturbing trends that indicated a perceived poor 'felt sense' (Gendlin, 2010) of wellbeing regarding friendships, school, and family relationships. In a further study generated from the voice of children by UNICEF (2013b) across 29 countries, British children ranked 16th and Hungary 20th. Due to these findings, The Good Childhood Enquiry (Layard, Layard, & Dunn, 2009) and The Good Childhood Report (The Children's Society, 2018a, p. 5), both involving data from the child's perspective in the United Kingdom, were commissioned and undertaken by the British Children's Society in 2007 and 2017. Both of these British research findings, gathered from the perspective of children expressing a low subjective 'felt sense' (Gendlin, 2010) of wellbeing, raised serious debates, as the "indices of general welfare were reversed". The summary makes shocking reading and elevated concerns in some childcare sectors around children's perceptions of self, perceptions of peer relationships, and conflicting internal feelings being expressed in school and family systems (The Children's Society, 2018a, p. 83). The research project, involving sleep dreams within a school context, contributes a unique and empirical insight into the unconscious as a valuable developmental aspect, as was perceived by the children and class teacher who participated in an English school over an academic year.

However, the researcher of this qualitative research contentiously contends that through Dream Time, a specific time to share sleep dreams, being incorporated creatively into existing children's Early Years and Primary educational experiences and the analysis of the children's and teacher's voice of the lived experiences of the project and

dreaming can offer only a small, but possibly valuable insight into a distinctive aspect of children's perceived wellbeing across any culture, specifically, their sense of wellbeing regarding the inner perspective of social, emotional, and spiritual development. Additionally, consideration of the synthesis of specific psychosocial and psychoanalytical concepts of the unconscious, dreams, and social dream matrices in pedagogical studies could, arguably, improve the teacher training programmes globally. Historically, there is much argument in favour of integration of the latter concepts (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009; Nye, 2009; Czikszentmihalyi, 2013). These bold if not highly controversial statements proposing the integration of psychoanalytical concepts and dream sharing within education formed the core challenge of the research, which focused on analysing the understanding of the child's views of sleep dreams within a pedagogical context. It is important to clarify the dreams were not analysed with the children in class as traditionally evolving from the therapeutic movement. The idea that dreams are a precious unconscious and natural phenomenon and therefore important to the development of a child's personality is not new. Humans have always dreamt and shared dreams and myths culturally and socially (Taylor, 1998). Over time, dream work became increasingly aligned to the therapeutic context due to the work of Freud and to Jung's dream analysis (Van de Castle, 1994; Punnet, 2018). However, from the research findings of Adams (2010), Gambini (2012), Mallon (2002), Selvaggi, Agresta, and Planera (2007, as cited in Lawrence, 2010), and Hoffman and Lewis (2014), to name a few, the 21st century countermovement towards integrating the sharing of dreams within a school curriculum is increasingly advocated and considered worthy of practice and further research.

Through amalgamating and revivifying the indigenous, culturally rich collective dream sharing tradition, the extensive social dream matrix research (Lawrence, 2005, 2010), and specific psychoanalytical theories, the researcher proposed that any contentious arguments that dreaming is only a neurobiological "random firing of neurons in sleep" (Crick & Mitchison, 1986, as cited in Taylor, 1998, p. 4) can be challenged, expounded, and dissipated. The unique Dream Time project activities, as implemented in this research, aimed to be held within a new culture of teachers understanding, through the voices of the children, that there is value in sharing dreams creatively and that a small time allocated to dream sharing within 'Circle Time'³ curriculum aims to enhance the development of every pupil's potential.

Essentially, this vision of Dream Time as an educational experience involves encouraging a child's creativity and imagination. These core developmental aspects are currently encouraged and nurtured in English Early Years educational curricula and pedagogy, but not to the same extent in the National Curriculum applied to older children (Department for Education, 2014a, 2014b). This shift towards a more fact-based

³ Circle Time (Mosley, 1996) was traditionally embedded as an activity to support children's feelings within the UK curriculum subject PSHE in Primary education. PSHE was proposed to become statutory in 2020.

curriculum is mostly due to the evolving political issues and pressures surrounding the need for teachers to assess, regulate, and quantify children's learning. Creativity and imagination are harder to assess. Even though there have been educational debates advocating more inclusion and recognition of creativity and imagination, which lie within the unconscious, in children's learning and even though testing has been done of these domains with well-known Torrance tests and thinking assessments, this aspect of the child in education generally appears to be side-lined (Kim, 2006; Starko, 2013).

Historically, research into potential links between intelligence and dreams has not been fruitful; however, psychosocial research by Lawrence and others into the sharing and expression of sleep dream activity indicated that this was without doubt conducive to children's development (Adams, 2010, 2016; Gambini, 2003; Lawrence, 2005, 2010; Mallon, 2002; Selvaggi, Agresta, & Planera, 2007, as cited in Lawrence, 2010). Research into Lawrence's social dream matrix method suggested "sharing dreams collectively within a school context" is feasible, as it provides a "pedagogical extension to understanding how children think" (2010, p. 22). It includes the concept of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1953), and as Selvaggi and Planera's research (2007 as cited in Lawrence 2010) discuss, it is a successful method that includes time and attention to consider the unconscious elements of life and the collective culture within a school, indicating that Lawrence's 'four modes of thinking'⁴ can be educationally developed. Therefore, by integrating an opportunity for children to collectively share unconscious thoughts raised a correlation to Jung's views on the collective unconscious, children's dreams, and the beginnings of consciousness in his theory of 'individuation',⁵ a process that young children need in order to thrive (Jung, 1971, 2008, p. 100). The post-Jungian theorists Fordham and Neumann went on to develop Jung's theory on early childhood ego development within the theory of individuation. Today, their ideas are globally established as the Jungian child developmental school (Fordham, 1944, 1969; Neumann, 1954, 1988). Additionally, Piaget (1962) indicated in his studies that children's dream content can be harnessed as a possible assessment tool for various domains and stages of cognitive ability, in which creativity and imagination are included. Piaget's theories have been used as a guiding framework for assessing and planning educational programmes and level descriptors for over the last two decades. However, it is worth considering Piagetian cognitive perspectives on

⁴ Lawrence's thinking modes: The 'four modes of thinking' that Lawrence (2005, p. 20) referred to are (a) 'thinking as being', which involves thinking about our human state and condition and is closely attached to what we call 'white noise', and (b) 'thinking as becoming'. These are both in the realm of consciousness and within awareness. The other two modes are (c) 'thinking as dreaming' and (d) 'thinking as the unthought known' (p. 73).

⁵ Jung referred to the psyche as a self-regulating system, similar to the body, and its function is to seek and maintain a balance between conflicting feelings or qualities of personality. The psyche innately strives for growth, a process Jung called individuation (Jung, 1960). He proposed it started in the adolescent/puberty stage of life. Jung's psyche is abstractly constructed of differing layers of consciousness: the self with a small 's' and similar to ego often referred to as persona, the *shadow* is often repressed consciousness, archetypes such as anima and animus and the soul self with a large 'S' are in the unconscious.

child development being reassessed for their one-sided and more linear perspective towards contemporary child development psychology. Therefore, this research offers pedagogues a re-orientation of spatial and temporal views of the inner worlds of contemporary childhood.

Considering the need for reflexivity and summary in any research proposal, the central questions raised in the research included: (a) How do children and the class teacher experience the sharing of sleep dreams in a group, and (b) What is meaningful about sharing children's dream experiences in a group in a school context? As stated above, this researcher explored the hypothesis that from researching the children's perceptions from a psychosocial and psychoanalytical perspective there was a potential for extending Dream Time into the child's educational life. This researcher proposed, like other researchers (Hoffman & Lewis et al., 2014), that sleep dreams can be creatively and sensitively brought into the classroom without analysis, therefore establishing an additional place to extend the sharing of children's inner worlds. Adding to the argument is the contemporary neuroscience research on brain scans by Jungian researchers Kahn, Hartmann, and Hoss (2012),⁶ whose findings brought neuroscience evidence from PET scans on the default and executive networks of the brain and dreams, indicating that sharing dreams improved emotional regulation and mental health.

The concepts surrounding a child's inner world need explanation, as the inner world is experienced differently to the outer world; it involves emotional experiences, fantasies, feelings, imagination, and dreams. It informs our responses to the outer world and personality. Notably in 1938, Wickes, a student of Jung, was the first to write about the aspect of the inner world of childhood from a Jungian perspective (Gambini, 2003, 2012; Semetsky, 2013) focus on the inner world being expressed into the outer world in a social context and validate how the transcendent processes of consciousness can be nurtured through a sensitive approach to sharing dreams. The creative, ethical, and delicate bridging of the child's inner dream worlds to the outer world was explored as a key thread throughout the researcher's Dream Time project.⁷

Method

The key factors of the methodology analysed include the ethical dilemmas involved in researching children's dreams and undertaking research in a school context. The Dream Time project, a PhD study, underwent a rigorous university ethical review process and then started with a pilot study in a nursery school with eight 4- to 5-year-olds sharing dreams in a story time session with a familiar teacher. The action research progressed to the researcher undertaking a longer innovative project with a class of 6-year-old children in a state infant school. The 22 participant children were given an

⁶ Also see Hoss, in *Dreams and Spirituality* for a deeper insight into dreams, REM, neuroscience, and psychological growth (Adams et al., 2015) and www.dreamscience.org.

⁷ See research on sharing dreams, relationships and social conduct by Ijams and Miller (2000).

opportunity to share their dreams on a weekly basis with the researcher ‘hosting’ an adapted social dream matrix approach (Lawrence, 2005). The teacher was present in the room. Phase one consisted of six whole class Dream Time matrices held every Wednesday morning over the first academic term. Other activities facilitated by this researcher during this first phase included making dream catchers and providing a class writing table with paper, pens, dream jars, and a class dream journal for collating their offerings. Phase two, held during Term 2, involved hosting five smaller Dream Time matrices (with five children each) and collecting one-to-one interviews with 22 children. Phase three included the researcher reading *The BFG* (Dahl, 2010) to the class at story time and sharing the class dream journals. These three phase activities occurred over a sustained and regular period of an academic year. See below **Figure 1**.

As stated above, the researcher utilised the psychosocial research method known as social dream matrix (SDM) (Lawrence, 2005). However, to set the Dream Time project in methodological context, the core data analysed to present new findings was collected from analysis of six whole-class social dream matrices hosted by the researcher. Next, 22 children aged 6 years were invited to child-centered one-to-one interviews to communicate their perceptions of dreams, dreaming, and sharing them in the project activities. Out of the 22 interviews, 8 were chosen as a sample and were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Flowers & Larkins, 2009). See **Figure 2** below for the systematic IPA adapted analytical process. The findings from the children’s perceptions were examined using specific theories on dream work from Jung’s seminars on children’s dreams (2008), Jungian holistic education, and English pedagogy.

Diagram of the Dream Time project action research Phases.

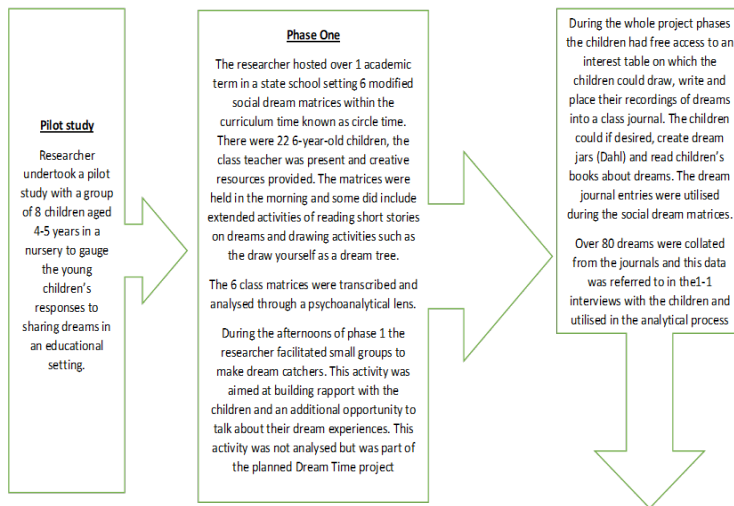


Diagram of the Dream Time project action research Phases.

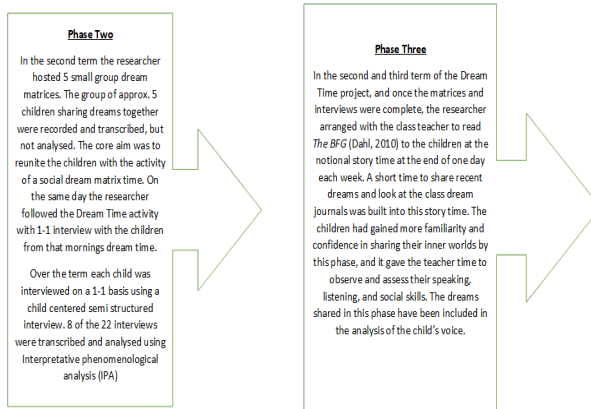


Figure 1. Flow diagram of the research project phases designed by the researcher.

Figure 2. IPA Adapted Systematic Analytical Stages of Children's Interviews



Figure 2. Flow chart of the systematic IPA process undertaken when comparing across 22 interviews

Results or Findings

Conjecturing from the child interview analyses and the context of a teacher having to implement Dream Time in a busy curriculum with a large percentage of children needing emotional acknowledgement, the cases findings raise rich and valuable debates for how Dream Time can be feasibly introduced to teachers or teacher training in the future. However, the aim of this thesis was to explore through interviews how children perceived the experiences of dreaming and sharing their dreams within a school context using a social dream matrix approach. As conclusively determined from the IPA analysis, sharing dreams was perceived as good, fun, and interesting, even if the dream or feelings were scary, confusing, or bad. The lived experience of a social Dream Time was overall expressed by the children as a positive activity, and all eight children whose responses were analysed wished to continue the activity of Dream Time in school in the future.

The findings from the children's perspective suggest that sharing dreams in class in school did help them feel more confident about sharing their inner worlds, that dreams are created externally, and that how dreams enter their sleep and bodies is confusing and often perceived as magical. They were making sense of the phenomenon of dreams from books or films or from sharing each other's ideas. They all expressed their feelings about their own and peers' dreams and could articulate these feelings with varying degrees of growing confidence. The children shared more difficult emotions than good feelings in the interviews rather than in the group time, suggesting sharing with a safe adult is preferred to the peer group. In contrast to the teacher's perspective, which indicated more concern or questioning about whether sharing feelings within the emotional and social curriculum fitted in with her teaching role, this project ran the themes presented through NVivo, with the highest number of motifs being animals and insects, correlating with Jung's theory of the child being closer to the unconscious and their instinctual nature. Additional findings on the second highest number of symbols presented, which were monsters, concurred with Beaudet's (1990) research and discussion of Jung's idea of archetypal imaginary monsters appearing as regulatory images, which can also be influenced by cultural projections or stories.

As with any qualitative IPA research, the findings evolving out of this research have to a large extent subjective bias from the researcher's professional knowledge and philosophy and, therefore, needed reflexive scrutiny. These reflexive aspects of bias and opening of blind spots were addressed using a hermeneutic method of analysis of intersubjective processing (Smith et al., 2009). Other limitations are due to the small scale of the research, and further or wider research is suggested.

Discussion and Conclusion

The research findings do add new discussion into how contemporary children perceive their dreams and dream sharing within a group in a school. In addition, the findings contribute fresh discussion into the feasibility and value of psychosocial and psychoanalytical concepts within teacher training programmes across Western and Eastern countries. Specific to discussions raised in this special edition, this research was presented at an international conference entitled *Early Childhood Pedagogy and Practice Beyond the Iron Curtain: Past, Present and Future* held in Debrecen, Hungary, in 2021.⁸ As this conference provoked debate on the effects of humans in the Anthropocene, we must consider the interconnectedness of humanity and the planet: Who is affecting whom? This paper suggests a re-imagining of the interconnectedness of consciousnesses from the progressive view of children in education and a reviewing of the integration of psychosocial Jungian psychology within pedagogy.

If you look deeply into the work of Carl Jung on the unconscious dream world, you find a significant theoretical stance in which he is concerned with the interconnectedness of humans, the natural and/or spiritual worlds. Humans being perceived as a microcosm of the macrocosm. An example of the power of dream states is illustrated by his famous premonition vision in October 1913, cited in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1995, p. 199). The dream-like vision was of the onslaught of the First World War. The horrors of war and catastrophe were persistent in his dreams, that of 'blood across a landscape', death of living things from freezing, including the fruit of the world tree. All this occurred before war was declared on August 1, 1914. It is remarkable how attuned and symbiotic his unconscious was in relationship to the collective consciousnesses. Jung proposed that children are even closer to the realm of the unconscious and carry these memories. Should their dreams be shared, shining the light on the shadow, if we are to move forward consciously?

Finally, I align the research with children's dreams within education to revisioning threads of our dreaming capacity and how dreams can inform us of the inner world of the child and for educators the value of dream sharing as a pedagogical tool. The qualitative phenomenological research method utilised was the social dreaming matrix originating from the work of Lawrence in the 1980s. However, historically sharing dreams was not a method, but was a daily part of community life before the onslaught of so many ologies. Today when I hear, 'It's only a dream', I challenge this. Do not dismiss the sharing. Yes, it is a dream, and it has more meaning and regulatory capacity than we can imagine.

So, at its core, my research involved the sharing of oneiric dreams within a school community to transform thinking for the children and their teachers. I advocate,

⁸ This paper is derived from a PhD dissertation and was presented as an oral presentation at the conference 'Spinning the Sticky Threads of Childhood Memories: From Cold War to Anthropocene' October 2021 at the Faculty of Education for Children and Special Educational Needs, Debrecen University, Hajdúböszörmény, Hungary.

from the voices of the children that researched with me, that the act of a social dream matrix spins the threads of the personal and the collective lived experiences towards their perceived benefits to emotional and social development. This natural ritual of honouring humans' unconscious dream worlds has over time been ignorantly suppressed and created through a cartesian lens a separation from the holistic view in pedagogy. The relationships between the collective and the geographical development of the planet has lost its equilibrium. Where does childhood stand in this dilemma? Let us go back to the source of childhood and their dreams.

SANJANJE U ŠKOLI: KVALITATIVNI PSIHOLOŠKI ISTRAŽIVAČKI PROJEKAT O DELJENJU SNOVA

Apstrakt

Studije Karla Junga iz perioda 1936-1940 i post-jungovske studije pružaju ubedljiv uvid u značaj dečijih snova i dečjeg arhetipa u razvoju nesvesnog. Opsežan pregled analitičke literature o postojećim istraživanjima dečjih snova i analiza fenomenološkog pogleda na sanjanje i deljenje snova u kontekstu britanske škole pokazali su da su dečija iskustva iz snova nedovoljno iskorišćena u osnovnom obrazovanju. Kvalitativni istraživački projekat je imao za cilj da analizira dečje percepcije i iskustva deljenja snova o spavanju u okviru epistemološke, psihosocijalne i jungovske perspektive. Ova fenomenološka perspektiva oniričkih snova dece koja žive u 21. veku širom sveta pojačava diskurs o važnosti Junga u savremenoj pedagogiji. Kako je sanjanje univerzalna ljudska funkcija, vredi proširiti diskurs o podeli snova u školama u kontekstu socijalističkog detinjstva, tvrdeći da se rezultati ovog projekta mogu preuzeti kao validan pedagoški pristup. U empirijskoj studiji, 22 dece je podelilo svoje snove u šest prilagođenih matrica snova (Social Dreaming Matrix) i kreativnih aktivnosti koje je vodio ovaj istraživač, nakon čega su usledili individualni intervjui sa istraživačem. Matrice su analizirane sa fokusom na psihoanalitičke i obrazovne perspektive. Od 22 intervjua, uzorak od osam je analiziran primenom Interpretativne fenomenološke analize (IPA). Nalazi studije dečjih percepcija o deljenju svog unutrašnjeg sveta u kontekstu obrazovnog okruženja pokazuju da je deljenje dobrih i strašnih snova u školskom vremenu bilo pozitivno iskustvo i želeli su da se tako nastavi.

Ključne reči: Social Dreaming, dečiji glasovi, pedagogija, Jung, fenomenološki.

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