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THE TEACHING OF PSYCHODRAMA THEORY

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The feeling of many psychodramatists about theory is expressed by Voltaire's character Martin in *Candide*: "Let us work without theorizing, 'tis the only way to make life endurable." While often ignoring theoretical issues altogether, practitioners skillfully master techniques in an almost artistic fashion and base their work on intuition. But intuition alone, however brilliant its results sometimes may be, is insufficient as a tool for understanding. Intuition needs to be supplemented by systematic psychological knowledge. For example, though it is important to be able to confront and reassure a protagonist in a sensitive manner, the skill is useless without an understanding of who to confront and who to reassure, when and for what purpose. Knowledge must complement the use of specific action skills and provide a foundation for doing and acting in thinking and understanding. If this is achieved, psychodrama becomes both an art and a science; an art that demands creative skills which are obtained through practical training and a science that demands systematized knowledge that can be obtained from reading, research and classroom study.

But what systematic knowledge does a psychodramatist need? Which theoretical issues should be taught to students of psychodrama? Defining these issues is a current concern of licencing boards and training institutes and will be a focus of the present paper. Here, I will try to delineate some of these issues through a description of my course in psychodrama theory. It is based on over twenty years of research and teaching at different institutes and training centers in Scandinavia, Europe and in Israel.

Theory.

My view of what should be taught to students of psychodrama is based on a job description which includes four interrelated tasks required by psychodramatist: "First, as analysts they are responsible for making themselves fully and accurately aware of the protagonists' condition. This includes understanding both personal and interpersonal phenomena in order to attribute meaning to experience and increase awareness of self. Second, as producers, psychodramatists are theatre directors translating the material presented into action which is emotionally stimulating and aesthetically pleasant. Third, as therapists, they are agents of change who influence their protagonists in ways that facilitates healing. Fourth, as group leaders, they foster a constructive work group climate which facilitates the development of a supportive social network" (Kellermann, 1992, p. 46). All four roles demand both a competence in specific skills, as well as knowledge of a multitude of phenomena. For example, the empathic function of the analyst may be aided by knowledge in personality theory, the influencing skills of the therapist may be aided by knowledge in change processes, the staging skills of the producer may be aided by knowledge in classical drama theory

and the leadership skills of the group leader may be aided by knowledge in small group research.

Personality theory, change processes, drama theory and small group research involve a wide body of knowledge that is interdisciplinary and multi-dimensional in nature. An integrative, meta-psychological structure is therefore needed to bring them together within one framework. Though Moreno's theories clearly fail to provide such a uniform and comprehensive theoretical structure, it is the presently best system available. A basic study of Moreno's three foundation "pillars" (role theory, sociometry and spontaneity-creativity theory) certainly provides a good basis for understanding the various psychosomatic, individual, interpersonal, social and spiritual processes occurring within psychodrama. Sometimes I have felt that they are too profound and complex for the average student who initially may need some more concise and unambiguous concepts to aid them in their thinking, but they are as yet unmatched when it comes to an in-depth, integrative and all-inclusive understanding of the phenomena involved. However, I frequently try to interpret Moreno's ideas in a language more understandable to students, such as in terms of social psychology and/or psychoanalytic ego psychology, object relations theory, group psychology and/or various learning and developmental psychology theories. My personal preference is to understand psychodrama within such broader frameworks in which human beings are viewed in relation to other fellow-beings within a social context and as moving through stages throughout their life span.

The Course.

The objectives of the course are: (1) to learn to describe, understand, and begin to use the major concepts of psychodrama and the major personality theories of Moreno and relate them to social psychology and psychoanalytic theories; (2) to think divergently about a single therapeutic process and consider multiple explanations for psychological phenomena; and (3) to generate a number of intervention competencies. Shortly, the goal of the course is to help students translate practice into theory and theory into practice. As a result, it is hoped that they will become able to explain *why* they do what they do, and be able to communicate their understanding in a manner understood also by non-initiated co-workers and presumptive clients.

The course is given to advanced students of psychodrama, who usually have had at least a few years of personal experience and training in psychodrama and who are familiar with the basic techniques and processes as described in Blatner's (1988) book "Acting In."

Since it is easier for many students to focus on theory with some amount of personal detachment, no personal psychodrama sessions are conducted within the course. Neither are students directing vignettes, nor do they process the work of their fellow students or receive in-depth supervision of work done outside the course. The reason for this division of emotional experience and theoretical understanding is that one often seems to interfere with the other within a training context. However, as a matter of course, the material brought in by students for discussion is based on their own observations, both as protagonists and as directors. They are thus helped to gain a deeper understanding of psychodrama in psychotherapy and gain more awareness of their professional roles. Meanwhile, their personal therapeutic needs are put aside and dealt with in another setting.

Both lecture-discussions and didactic exercises are employed to clarify specific issues. For example, the training exercise evaluating students' role performance (Kellermann, 1992, p. 56) regarding the four professional roles of the psychodramatist is regularly included in the curriculum.

Students are provided with an extensive reference bibliography of relevant books and papers for their own research on specific subjects (Sacks, Bilaniuk & Gendron, 1995; Hare, 1986). Kellermann's (1992) Focus on Psychodrama is obligatory literature, as well as selected papers by Moreno and others. The books in English by Blatner & Blatner (1988), Dayton (1994), Fox (1987), Goldman & Morrison (1984), Holmes (1992), Holmes & Karp (1991), Holmes, Karp & Watson (1994), Kipper (1986), Marineau (1989) and Williams (1989) are recommended reading. A few handouts, such as Hale's (1981, p. 5) overview of Moreno's theories, are also given to students in the beginning of the course.

Three written exams, and/or homework assignments are given to students during the course. If time allows, a short psychodramatic case presentation with a relevant integration of theories is written by students and sometimes presented to the class. Occasionally, issues of special interest (special settings, populations or applications of psychodrama) are chosen by students for in-depth research and the results are presented and discussed in class.

For practical reasons, the course usually lasts about 50 hours, divided into some 20 x 2.5 hour sessions depending on the overall timeframe of the training institute. The following subjects are covered during these twenty lessons (Note 1):

Note 1.

Though subjects here are divided into a practical and theoretical part, they are not necessarily presented in this order during the course.

References refer to chapters in Kellermann (1992) and other papers.

Practical basis for psychodrama (theory of psychodramatic technique)

1. Basic Concepts and history of psychodrama. Hearing the voice of Moreno.
2. The definition of "psychodrama." Familiarization with the bibliography. General questions by students (based on their own experience). (Ch. 1)
3. Participants; protagonist, auxiliary ego, group/audience & psychodramatists' four professional roles. (Ch. 3)
4. The therapeutic process in psychodrama; processing checklist. (Appendix)
 - A. Warm up
 - B. Selecting the protagonist
 - C. Treatment contract
 - D. Interviewing (focusing)
 - E. Scene setting
 - F. Putting auxiliaries into role

- G. Enactment
- H. Closure (Ch. 13)
- I. Sharing
- J. Processing (Ch. 14)

5. Basic techniques of psychodrama:

- soliloquy
- mirroring
- doubling
- role reversal (Kellermann, 1994)
- others; concretizing, maximizing, sculpturing, etc.

6. Therapeutic aspects of psychodrama: (Ch. 5)

- Catharsis (emotional abreaction) (Ch. 6)
- Action-Insight (cognitive restructuring, experiential learning) (Ch. 7)
- Tele (interpersonal) (Ch. 8)
- As-If (surplus reality, imagination, simulation, play) (Ch. 9)
- Acting-Out (action expression) (Ch. 10)
- Ritual & Magic (suggestion, non-specific factors) (Ch. 11)

7. Resistance (Ch. 12)

Theoretical Basis for Psychodrama

- 8. Warm-up, spontaneity & creativity theory.
- 9. Role theory (role taking, role playing & de-roling).
- 10. The social atom (or network) and sociometry.
- 11. Research; process/outcome, design, qualitative/quantitative, report writing (Kellermann, 1987).
- 12. Special settings: individual therapy, family therapy, business organizations, schools, prisons, psychiatric hospitals, etc.
- 13. Special populations: children, adolescents, the aged, various psychiatric disorders, addictions, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, etc., as well as a discussion of psychopathology and the use of diagnosis in psychodrama (Kellermann, 1998a).
- 14. Interpersonal conflict management in group psychotherapy. (Kellermann, 1996)
- 15. Sociodrama. (Kellermann, 1998b)
- 16. Group psychology, small group research, group dynamics.
- 17. Comparison with other approaches, e.g. gestalt, drama therapy (Kedem-Tahar & Kellermann, 1996), psychoanalysis, hypnosis, crisis counselling & debriefing,

existential therapy, Jungian and Adlerian approaches, behavior therapy, play therapy, expressive therapies, humanistic psychology, TA, new age, etc.

18. Other issues: dream-presentation, Axiodrama, magic shop, encounter, etc.

19. Ethics in Psychodrama (responsibility, competence, welfare, advertisement, confidentiality, relationships, values). (Kellermann, 1998c)

20. Summary, evaluation and termination.

This is obviously a voluminous course, covering a mass of material which may be difficult to convey in such a short time. Therefore, and in order to digest the material presented, students are encouraged to study individually between classes. Only if this is done, will the course help them to fully integrate the theories into their own personal philosophies because. Naturally, many issues can be touched upon only briefly within such a short time frame and demand further attention at a later stage. However, it is my hope that the course will provide a theoretical overview of the main issues so that students later can pursue their own interests within a more comprehensive theoretical framework.

An indirect goal is to develop a non-dogmatic, inquiring and open attitude in relation to the psychodrama. Students are encouraged to take a critical viewpoint on everything taught and questions like “Is that really so?” are welcomed in order to expose fallacies, myths and false assumptions. “Truth” is not to be accepted just because somebody (be it Moreno or anybody else) said so. Theories have to be constantly verified through personal experience and empirical research. It is hoped that the students will come to appreciate research as a way to improve both their personal understanding of complicated treatment issues and as a way to contribute to the general accumulation of knowledge in the profession as a whole. As a general rule, the course often ends with a number of specific research questions that students continue to explore and investigate towards their final thesis work.