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INTRODUCTION TO SOCIODRAMA

by

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This workshop will be concerned with the use of the term sociodrama, the origins of sociodrama, and the training of a sociodrama director. Conference participants will have an opportunity to enact a sociodrama and explore an issue of interest to occupational therapists as a group. There will be time for sharing about this experience and reflecting about the potential application of sociodrama by occupational therapists.

Sociodrama

Sociodrama is a group method involving techniques such as role play, role reversal, and scene setting to explore a social issue in action. The sociodrama director works with a group to identify an issue of common concern to its members and then select a situation from life which would illustrate how this issue manifests itself. A spontaneous drama is created out of this situation which enables group members to explore the forces in society contributing to the behaviour of individuals in that particular event. Inter-personal, inter-group and inter-cultural conflicts can be explored in this way. The roles enacted in a sociodrama are social roles and the player represents the collective aspect of the role, e.g. the role of patient is played on behalf of all patients and patients as a group would be able to identify with the role as it is portrayed.

Sociodramatists in Perth have been working with a variety of groups for both educational and therapeutic purposes: prison officers working with drug offenders, medical practitioners learning about alcoholism, architectural students interviewing couples for housing consultancies, allied health professionals looking at the management of pain, psychiatric patients returning to community life, social work students exploring issues of social concern - sociodrama can be very rich in its range of application and the depth to which an issue can be explored.

Origins

The word sociodrama was first coined by Dr Jacob L. Moreno who was also the originator of the terms role play, psychodrama (1913), sociometry (1937), group psychotherapy (1931) and spontaneity training. Dr Moreno experimented with an early form of sociodrama in Vienna in 1925, and later in New York in 1931, which he called "the living newspaper". The living newspaper was enacted in a theatre where players selected from the audience recreated the news of the day in unrehearsed dramas. Reporters would bring the stories to the theatre, Dr Moreno would assign roles, scenes would be set and the drama would unfold. Players would bring to life the cultural and physical characteristics of people and places as they experienced some of the dynamic elements of an actual news event.

Role Theory

"The concept underlying this approach is the recognition that *man is a role-player*, that every individual is characterised by a certain range of roles which dominate his behaviour, and that every culture is characterised by a certain set of roles which it imposes with a varying degree of success upon its membership". (J.L. Moreno, Psychodrama, Vol. 1, p. 354).

Fundamental to the use of sociodrama, and other action methods, is a working understanding of role theory based on a systems model. Dr Moreno defined a role as the actual and tangible forms which the self takes in a given moment (Vol. 1, p. 153). In the development of a sociodrama the director is differentiating all the roles involved in the social system being investigated. As each new role emerges a player or group of players, is assigned the role and immediately commences to explore the dynamic relationship of this role with other roles already established. All roles are viewed as interactional - i.e. behaviour is stimulated in response to the perceived environment. A teacher presenting himself in a blaming, critical role over a stealing incident will stimulate counter-roles in his pupils - some may respond with fearful withdrawal, some with placating behaviour and some with angry defiance. These behaviours may in turn stimulate further punishing and rejecting behaviour in the teacher. A system of role inter-action is being played out with roles and connecting counter-roles emerging to form a role system. The role system can be

brought into the view of players and audience through the dramatic enactment of events in life. Time and space constraints of ordinary life can be transcended in a drama so that all the elements of a situation can be experienced as a whole although ordinarily some of these remain invisible though influential. Players can experiment with new solutions to old conflicts and discover their effectiveness by testing the solutions out in the social system on stage.

Sociodrama Differs From Other Action Methods

Psychodrama and sociodrama differ in important respects from each other. A sociodrama session is structured in a similar way to a psychodrama session (warm-up phase, action phase and post-action sharing) and the action techniques are similar. The two methods differ in the contract made between group members and director and in that each has a different focus in its dramas.

Psychodrama is a therapeutic method focussing on the individual's repertoire of personal roles out of which he relates to himself, to other individuals and to groups. In a psychodrama a protagonist is chosen to enact his personal story as a representative of the group. He is expressing an issue of concern that the whole group is warmed up to and hence the resolution to his drama will be the property of the group and will affect all other group members.

Sociodrama is an educational method which can be therapeutic and focusses on the collective aspects of roles and their cultural origins rather than on the private components of a role arising out of an individual's unique experience. Players enacting roles in a sociodrama do so as a representative of that social role rather than as their personal selves.

e.g. In a sociodrama exploring drug taking among high school students, the player taking the role of the parent represents all parents in respect to this problem - not a particular parent.

Sociodrama generally focusses on the ordinary reality of the social world. There is no exploration of an individual's intra-psychic roles, scenes from a person's past, or fantasy and dream life - these are more appropriately the realm of psychodrama where there is a contract to focus on the personal

growth of the individual.

Role training also needs to be differentiated from sociodrama. A role training contract undertakes to develop a specifically stated cluster of roles and extend group members repertoire of roles in this area. Generally, a role training group is named according to the roles being developed, e.g. there are groups offering assertion training, empathy training, spontaneity training, parent effectiveness training, social skills training and play roles for adults. In these groups there is an emphasis on learning and training in specific areas of behaviour. Action methods are used to role play situations which the individual is likely to encounter in life and for which he will need to develop adequate roles. Role training is therefore more limited in its contract than is either psychodrama or sociodrama.

However, both sociodrama and psychodrama may include some role training in the resolution phase of a drama, e.g. a sociodrama with social work students dramatised the housing situation of aboriginal people in relation to social work agencies. It became clear in the drama that new roles would need to be developed if social workers were to learn alternatives to the rescuing position they were taking in the drama and aboriginals were to find alternatives to the hopelessness and confusion they were demonstrating. Skills in active listening and assertion would allow for more dialogue between the two groups.

Role Play

Role play is the technique used to create the dramatic situation and enable the experience to take on the qualities of immediate reality. Sociodrama, psychodrama and role training all use forms of role playing. This can be a simple role play of one scene where people are assigned roles and a situation defined by the director, or it can involve a deeper enactment of reality through use of additional techniques such as role-reversal, scene setting, soliloquy, and the double to extend the dimensions of the drama. It is the spontaneous creativity of the players that gives role play its dynamic character. There is no script or prior rehearsal of lines.

Deroling. Role play action takes place in a delineated space bounded by the audience sitting in a U shape. This aids players to differentiate the action of a drama in time and space from ordinary reality so that when they return to their seats they become themselves as group members again. Lighting can also aid this de-roling process so that the sharing time at the end of a drama is always done with lights full on. Encouraging players to remove props used in scene setting helps to create a closure and make the transition from drama time and space, to group time and space. The director further affirms the transition by addressing group members by name and inviting them to share what was meaningful to them in their current lives. Players who have maintained one role throughout a drama, without any role reversal, may sometimes need additional assistance in de-roling. This can be done in three steps :

1. Have them address other players while still in role and express any unfinished thoughts or feelings. Direct the other players to listen without responding.
2. Have that person state to the group what they have learned as a person through being in that role.
3. Have the person state to the group who they are in this group and anything else they want to make clear about themselves with other group members.

The Sociodrama Director

The sociodrama director or sociodramatist is trained in the use of action methods and the application of sociometric theory to explore social systems, social roles and conflict resolution of group issues. He or she needs to be able to use these methods with a variety of different kinds of groups, adapting them to the functioning level of the group, its size, and the particular issue being explored. Director skills involve being able to work with group process, identify a group central concern, produce a spontaneous drama that is appropriate to the contract and maintains the interest of group members, and bring a group to adequate closure.

When invited by an organisation to lead a sociodrama session the sociodramatist will need to analyse the social system of that organisation in order to obtain a workable contract with them to run the session. A contract needs to be negotiated which is compatible with the aims of both the organisation and the sociodramatist, and which is acceptable to those persons in positions of authority. An adequate contract ensures that the work of the sociodramatist is legitimate and effective within that system.

The Western Australian Institute of Psychodrama has outlined three major roles needing to be developed by the trainee sociodramatist :

1. Role of producer of a drama
2. Role of social investigator
3. Role of therapeutic guide

1. As producer of a drama the sociodramatist directs players in warming up to roles and enacting a situation so that it comes to life in the immediate present and is absorbing to the group. Directions are given in language which stimulates the sense that a here-and-now actual experience is taking place. The director keeps the energy of the group focussed on the action and discourages conversations about the action while a drama is in progress. Rather than describing a story, or a character, the players are encouraged to do it in action. The drama is hence a direct experience in the now rather than a related experience from the past.
2. As social investigator the sociodramatist notices and analyses all relevant information about a social system and conceptualises this in role theory terms. The social system may be that of the group itself, the social issues portrayed in a drama, or the organisation which has contracted the sociodramatist. A social investigator has the ability to notice and record what happens in a system and keep an open and enquiring attitude to events without setting himself/herself up as judge. An adequate assessment of the social system becomes the basis for therapeutic intervention.
3. As therapeutic guide the sociodramatist actively intervenes in the

dramatic enactment of a system to allow new perceptions, roles and solutions to emerge in response to the situation. The sociodramatist needs to be experienced by group members as an empathic person, in tune with the group and in touch with their own feelings and processes. Action methods remain hollow and are not fully effective unless the director is congruent and genuine as a person and is facilitating the groups' concerns rather than attempting to impose their own perceptions or solutions. Sociodrama is totally subjective and is created out of players own life experiences - all contributions from group members are accepted as relevant and valid. A sociodrama director needs to have developed a wide repertoire of roles and be able to take whatever role will facilitate group process.

Training as a Sociodrama Director

The Western Australian Institute of Psychodrama has now established standards of training toward certification as a Sociodrama Director. These lay out in some detail the knowledge and skills required for the application of the sociodramatic method. Training and certification is available to people with professional qualifications in the fields of occupational therapy, social work, psychology, psychiatry, nursing, teaching, theology and other allied fields.

Trainees are required to have participated in 800 hours of experience in accredited training groups over a minimum of two years. They need to have demonstrated the skills outlined in the standards of training and to have completed a written thesis in the area of sociodrama. An evaluation of a trainee is completed by two Teaching Directors to ascertain that an adequate level of skill development has been achieved.

The Australian and New Zealand Association of Psychodramatists, Sociodramatists, Sociometrists and Role Trainers was inaugurated in Canberra in 1979. This body is currently concerned with co-ordinating training programmes throughout Australia and New Zealand.

Occupational Therapy and Sociodrama

Occupational therapists have been experimenting with sociodramatic techniques as an adjunct to other therapeutic activities in a variety of

clinical settings for some years. It has application for many different kinds of patient groups in as far as occupational therapists are concerned with the functioning of their patients in social systems and their return to a full community life. Role theory using a systems approach and many of the associated concepts can also become a model for occupational therapy process in the broader sense. Occupational therapy also uses action methods to develop new roles enabling patients to function in more adequate and healthy ways.

It is now possible for occupational therapists in Australia and New Zealand to get training in the sociodramatic method and develop sociodrama as a post-graduate area of speciality. Sociodrama is a complex in-depth method of group work and is more appropriately a post-graduate training.

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