



I facilitate groups of people commonly regarded as long-term psychiatric patients from a variety of cultures, socio-economic situations, and with a variety of diagnoses. This on-going group is funded by regional health authorities and referrals are received via multidisciplinary teams across Wellington, NZ. The 2 hour long sessions are divided into 8 week cycles which allow people to enter and leave the group. Some people remain in the group for longer periods of time, some for several cycles.

I became aware I needed to address how the group was regarded and utilised by the local medical profession. I asked myself how I might discuss the group in a way that would lessen fear and that would inspire a sense of participation for referrers.

I was seriously thoughtful, as I wanted to protect people in the group from their fears of critical mental health workers.

Thinking sociometrically, I considered funders, referring clinicians, myself as a contracted psychodramatist, and clients along with the clients' relationships with the other professionals with whom they were involved.

There was an emotional release for me, as I experienced the freedom of sociometry. I was able to view the complexities as a map, choosing where and how to navigate forward.

In a colleague's office I saw a set of small figures and had the idea that I could make use of them to represent group members. The notion of

demonstration became dramatic and I saw that these 3D objects offered opportunities for an audience of referring clinicians to develop their own imagination. Projecting their own imagination onto a collection of figures representing the group would engage them in a psychodramatic process. Their experience would become more potent than any pre-existing fears.

My own excitement came to the fore. I was thrilled, playful.

Presenting to psychodrama peers at our regional currency meeting, I gained useful mirroring of my deep respect for group members and how I could bring a small figure alive with personality through description and demonstration. People were inspired.

I was surprised, as I had been somewhat naïve as to the value of such a production.

Presentation to a clinical team

Two weeks later I presented to one of the local clinical teams. We discussed the group for some time. As they began to develop questions, I emptied the box of small figures onto a table and asked folk to pull their chairs closer.

We had our warm-up and now we moved to action, with the client group as the protagonist.

As I responded to their questions by setting out scenes with the figures, I witnessed a high level of involvement and participation, people were alive and curious. My warm-up had considerably increased and I knew that I conveyed both information and experiences from the client group. Participants were keen for a follow up meeting in the future, so I let them know I was planning to extend my thinking into making a video and would bring this to them.

Video Interviews of clients

For some months previously I thought about videoing group members' stories and delivering their messages to mental health services as a way to communicate the value of attending a psychodrama group. Along with group members, I wanted to ensure ongoing State funding for the provision of groups to mental health consumers. We discussed this idea in the group and group members expressed their wishes as well as past experiences of being part of research or client studies. One client, who was a mental health worker, recalled an incident where their own personal case material was used in a presentation to a staff group in which they worked.

I was alerted to the importance of respect and privacy in a way I had never imagined.

Mustering courage I organised a temporary recording studio in my office. I spent time considering a process for doing the filming that would work best for the participants. I set up the room with a camera and each person came in one at a time whilst the others chatted and drank coffee together in another room. Group members were excited and gained confidence from being with each other in this way.

They were very keen to be interviewed on camera, to talk freely about their experiences of being in a group and about the use of the psychodrama method. All participants gave their permission for me to use the footage with the agreement I would re-contract with each person were I to use footage at a new event.

The value of role reversal, being in the “others’ shoes”, was repeatedly highlighted. They saw the value in seeing themselves and their situations from different perspectives. In reviewing the footage, people appreciated themselves and their own clarity. They were also relieved to see certain expressions edited out as the whole event was unscripted and spontaneous.

I realised that I was continuing to act as director, editor and creator of aesthetic production.

I became aware that watching videos of people speaking to a camera created too much emotional engagement with the individual on the screen. It became dyadic, slightly narrowed down and no longer psychodramatic as people “talked about” their experiences.

Something extra was required but I had no idea what was to come.

Presentation of video to clinical teams

After the previous session with the first staff team where I used only the small figures I now had the edited video interviews. For the next team presentation I decided to make use of the small figures on a table in conjunction with the TV screen so that the figures would add another dimension to the video interviews. I used the figures to further demonstrate to staff our group process, sociometric relationships, and role theory.

I was very pleased with presenting the interviews and how they were received. One staff member from overseas thought the interviewees were the mental health staff! I became freshly aware of the power of editing, focusing on clear expressions rather than the highlighting of pathology.

The use of the figures assisted the audience of clinical staff to see the dynamic aspects of group process and psychodramatic production, as well

as seeing the intra-psychic psychodynamics of the individuals attending the group. I was able to answer questions using the figures to produce a response, extending our conversation into action.

I really enjoyed highlighting how simply setting an object on the psychodrama stage immediately increases any chosen protagonists internal creative capacity.

I came away with the idea of making use of the figures to illustrate the narrative of the interviewees within the film itself. Listening to their descriptions of psychodramatic scenes, I realised that I could make more of the experience of enactment. I could see that any audience watching the recording would benefit from seeing enactment take place at the same time as listening to the interviewee.

As I extended my capacity to play with the figures, film and editing in the computer, I also discovered how to make brief animated films. I envisaged that these innovations could assist the viewer to be systemically engaged in a group process in a systemic way as well as to be emotionally engaged with the story teller/interviewee.

I then wondered if psychodramatists could warm themselves up to sharing their stories to the same extent as these clients were warmed up. I considered consulting with other practitioners as to how to make use of film to communicate and express what psychodrama is to them.

Presentation to AANZPA conference participants

I warmed myself up to a conference session where I would show the interviews plus my new plaything of filmic representations.

I giggled and laughed at the various edits, enjoying the spirit of the work gently growing.

At the conference, I presented the interviews layered with descriptive animations, synchronised with the voice of the interviewee, which offered the audience a playful vision of how psychodrama worked for people in the group.

I then offered to interview conference participants, which was a delightful experience. Fellow practitioners were invited to speak freely to the camera and our group about their experiences and understandings of psychodrama. People responded positively to the process. Some practitioners raised concerns regarding the ethics of using video material.

I felt an emerging apprehension and have carefully considered this voice of caution.

I approached the editing of this new series of interviews with a similarly thoughtful sensitivity, following the theme of using visual imagery and stop-motion photography to highlight the narrative of practitioners.

In order to share the footage with participating practitioners across the world, I experimented with posting edited footage on YouTube under private settings so that only invited parties could gain access. This footage included both clients and practitioners describing their experiences of psychodrama, along with plenty of playful imagery, the use of the small figures and editing.

I invited participants to make comment on the private YouTube channel with the intention of initiating an online dialogue. Most participants responded to me personally, highlighting the following points:

- developing scientific interest in the aims of using such techniques would support the efficacy of psychodrama
- new people may be attracted to psychodrama after seeing interesting video material online
- ethical dilemmas of recorded material may put client and practitioner at risk. Outline these risks early on in any project
- AANZPA practitioners can collaborate on such a project
- this experimental process may inspire new interest groups within the Association
- people were often surprised that they actually liked themselves on video even though beforehand they thought they would feel differently
- video material helps identify role development
- use of film for trainees could assist development of self-awareness
- videoing work may be an adjunct to supervision
- the use of imagery reinforces the imagination for participants and audience alike
- people who have no experience of psychodrama gain a window into the method before committing to a personal development, therapy or training group.

Thanks to everyone who participated and especially to those who continue to mirror, double and teach me how to bring myself forward.

Forward to the future

One purpose of this work has been to build sociometric connections between people through the making of film and discussing the use of filmic and other resources. An interest group is forming around this area of work.

An emerging idea from the ethical points raised has led me to edit video material that doesn't show a person's face, only voices illustrated by images. I am very interested to know what people experience watching this. You are invited to become involved in this work. Please view video

material and contribute by leaving comments on this channel www.youtube.com/user/jerribassi.

My intention is that we extend this work sociometrically across AANZPA and, where possible, psychodrama communities worldwide. Standing face to face with each other offers opportunities to reverse roles, to enjoy fresh innovative ideas and to discuss future applications of psychodrama.

For me this exploration is about maintaining a creative flow in one's life and work, to experiment, to follow an idea from a small beginning without knowing where this might lead, considering who might be affected. It is about allowing the process of spontaneity and creativity to become experience; it is the canon of creativity in action.

I am enlivened, filled like a flowing river, even though I might be perturbed by sudden bends and swirling eddies. I take time to regroup in the slow calm places. I am inspired with the multi-dimensions of our experiences, how we step into the unknown in order to explore psychodramatic scenes and I am excited as I discover how to represent these layers visually in film.

I love the simplicity of the Spanish term "puesta en abismo" which I translate as "to place in space". It's what I experience with the first creation on the empty stage.

Jerri Bassi is a psychodramatist/educator with AANZPA and a registered psychotherapist living and working in Wellington, New Zealand. Among other things he is interested in how sociometric awareness can lead to psychodramatic action. at home, thoughtfully with his toys, he loves in deeply the wild air and encountering the of our world.



*significant
When not
playing
breathing
of nature
immensity*