

Psychodrama as a Living Process

by Sue Daniel

Sue is a consulting psychologist and psychodramatist working in private practice in Melbourne. She teaches at the Australian College of Psychodrama and in several countries around the world. She is a TEPIT in ANZPA. As reflected in this article, Sue has an appreciation of the power and beauty of the moment which she also expresses as she ventures out in the world with her camera.

Working in the present means looking at what is occurring in a person or in a group in a fresh and open way. It requires my total attention of a therapist and group leader. The key element is to see clearly. This means looking without prejudice, without making judgements or analyses, and without choice. It also means that the protagonist is encouraged to see clearly. The technique of mirroring is one that serves this process.

I have found that very often a single session is all that is required to have a significant effect on a person. Time itself is not a factor. Rather there is a living process, a continuing movement in a process that has already begun or is beginning. The connection might continue from one day to the next or between one year and another.

In this article I present two pieces of work with the same protagonist. The first piece of work takes place in a training workshop. The second takes place in an open seminar on psychodrama the following afternoon. The theme is working with isolation. The enactments

provide an illustration of psychodrama as a living process.

Workshop 1

Irena is the protagonist. She is anxious about putting herself forward, however she willingly produces a sculpture of how she is experiencing herself in the group. The sculpture contains two aspects of her. Irena chooses a person to be herself with her arms folded across her heart protecting herself and another person to be a soldier on duty. She places them back to back. She takes up each role and we have two role reversals. After this I invite her to come outside of the scene and look at what she has done. She sees herself as being totally resistant and is happy she has been able to see it. I thank her and with that the work is concluded.

Workshop 2

Scene 1

Irena stands up, and then comes out when she perceives no one else standing. She is warmed up to a special moment that occurred some

years previously. Irena is walking home from work when she smells the aroma of stuffed zucchini cooking. Irena sets up a scene with beautiful old single-storeyed houses, each with a tree in front of it. She takes up the role of each and then chooses auxiliaries for the houses and trees. I ask her to be the spirit of the neighbourhood. An auxiliary is then chosen for this entity. Irena walks along the street and as she does the aroma emerges from a house. She takes up this role and accompanies herself as if dancing with a partner. As these “dancers” move slowly and silently together tears come to her eyes. She remembers a time in her childhood and feels a mixture of sadness and joy. We conclude this scene and move to a time when she is a little girl.

Scene 2

Irena is a small child. It is a clear night with many stars. Everyone in the group is chosen for a star. Some are very near Irena and some are very far away. The auxiliaries are situated low to the ground or kneeling and some are standing up or are on chairs. Irena says the stars are her toys and her friends. She focuses on one star and I asked her to take up this role. As the star Irena looks at the little girl and says, “She is a small child. I am so pleased to see her smiling.” I invite her to express herself to the child. Then I ask her to role reverse. The little girl looks at the star.

The Use of the Mirror

I ask Irena to choose someone to be the little girl and then to come outside of the scene with me. I hold her hand. In this mirror position she looks at herself and the whole scene. She takes it all in, observing

attentively. She sees that the child is alone. She feels lonely. She feels warm to her. I ask her to act in the scene with herself.

An Encounter

She goes over to herself and sits directly in front of the little girl. They clasp arms and embrace. She strokes the arms and shoulders of the little one. “I love you. You are beautiful and precious. I am here. I won’t go away.” I say, “Breathe and let yourself feel in this moment.” Tears cascade down the protagonist’s face. “I feel very peaceful”. I say to her and to the stars, “This is very poignant, this union.” “We are one,” she said. There are several role reversals. The protagonist is very tender in both roles, as herself and the little girl and the stars are all looking very soft. The soldier in Irena’s earlier sculpture is now off duty.

Enhancing the System

I ask the stars to bring their light to these people on earth. Some of the stars move to touch the child and her companion. Each gives the child a gift. Gifts include clear sight, friendship, love, light, joy and strength. Some gently touch her or kneel quietly nearby. Others gather closer together until each is linked physically. The protagonist looks around into the faces of each star and makes a connection through eye contact, and other non-verbal and verbal expression. Irena smiles broadly and with great joy says, “My good friends”. There is a great feeling of warmth and closeness. On this note the drama concludes.

The Sharing

Many people share special moments of childhood with grandparents and friends. Others say they had

experienced feelings that they hadn't felt for quite a long time. Not all is expressed verbally. Two young people hold hands throughout the sharing, their eyes soft with tears. Irena states that she is very pleased to have had the opportunity to be a protagonist and she thanks the group. The generosity of the group members in the sharing indicates that the drama has been fruitful for the protagonist and the group.

Conclusion

Working in the moment is the essence of the psychodramatic method. Irena was able to move out of isolation through connecting with other aspects of herself that were present in her social and cultural atom. This allowed her to make a very real connection with herself and others, and at the same time the group members made a connection with themselves. The living process is thus revealed.