

Tatou Tatou e

Co-leading a Bicultural Workshop

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Roberta is a child therapist/whanau (family) counsellor based in Nelson. Her tribal affiliations are Ngati Toa Rangatira, Ngati Koata and Ngati Rangiwewehi and she is actively involved in Iwi development. Roberta has been a tertiary student counsellor and tutored on the Certificate and Diploma of Counselling and Psychotherapy. She is a mother of 4, a grandmother of 9, and has miraculously survived 33 years of marriage.

N_u te rourou n_ku te rourou ka ora te tangata

**With your knowledge and experience and my
knowledge and experience this ensures the
well being of all.**

As part of our commitment to work across the Maori and Pakeha cultures in New Zealand, we had agreed to run a psychodrama workshop: Tatou Tatou e. This means “recognising diversity, coming together in unity”. We wanted to look at how we can value our own and each other’s worldview so that we make progress in creating a better future together. Naturally this raised a host of issues about warm up, the nature of leadership, living in the moment and trusting the method.

Leaving Myself at the Door

Carol

This conversation has been occurring over many years, since Roberta and I first met at a psychodrama workshop with Katerina Seligman in the mid nineties and it still continues to this day. How do we bring all of ourselves to

every moment? And anyway, what defines the moment?

The category of the ‘moment’ - the moment of being, living and creating is one of the most important underlying psychodramatic concepts as determined by Moreno (1972). In the moment, the enactment of the dynamic process of spontaneity and creativity alters our existing reality in some way (Holmes et al., 1994).

Carol

As a lesbian, there is a moment when entering a group where I both consciously and subconsciously ‘check out’ the group in relation to the question ‘Do I belong here?’ How can I fit in, when there is always the unknown in relation to how I might be viewed as a lesbian? What stereotypes about lesbians and hence about myself might exist in each situation? Who is safe and who isn’t? What is real, what is fantasy and what is paranoia?

Roberta

I am sitting by my mum on the point at Durville

Island looking towards the mainland. The sun warms my skin while mum's waiata (singing) caresses my soul. I am complete and feel the sense of oneness with times past, present and future.

Now, here I am in a psychodrama training session with strangers and I have left my "Maori-ness" at the door not trusting that I will be accepted for all of me and only bringing in, what experience has taught me, is ok. I look across at a soul mate, Carol, and have a knowing that she could understand what the impacts of the negative stereotypes might have on my well-being. That was when I knew that our common experience provided a pathway to co-creating a more meaningful way of being. Kia ora, Carol. I'm Roberta.

Carol

Here we are, January 2007, Whanganui-a-tara, Wellington; Aoteroa, New Zealand - here we are together again. This time, with a diverse multi-ethnic group of warm hearted, generous, self loving souls, exploring the interweaving of our stories and lives and what it is to leave aspects of ourselves at the door. Our hongi (the Maori greeting of pressing noses symbolic of sharing the breath of life) to warm the conference participants to us and our workshop, emerged in response to our coming together the previous evening to prepare for this workshop.

From Chaos to Creativity

Carol

Exhausted and frustrated, I had no energy for Roberta's arrival. Panic causes me to search for someone to awhi (support) Roberta. After the sixth person I approached indicated they were busy, I realised I had already asked Rosemary. She with Jacqui in tow, willingly set out to track her down and host her. It soon became apparent that a light hearted, fun loving role was required of me in order to engage with Roberta, so I attended Cher's 'seroc' dance session. An hour later I was ready to work alongside Roberta to co-create our workshop for the next morning. This then developed with ease.

Roberta

I travelled across on the ferry expecting to have time to think and finalise my role only to find that I lost my bags somewhere between Picton and Wellington. Anxiety levels rose, and confidence slipped through my fingers as time did. Wonderful friends drove into the station, commandeered my wellbeing, picked up my bags and took me to the conference dinner.

The planned time for the evening of complete dedication to the task of warming up to our workshop went out the back door. I realised I needed to touch base with the whanau (other Maori). We parted and took care of our own needs then met later and within an hour had created a plan out of chaos.

The Unfolding

Carol

Here we are...the beginning of the session.... a moment in time...a story of connection; I look at Roberta and in that moment I realise she isn't there....and for that matter neither am I... What now?... The horse has bolted, the best plans of mice and men....our conversation re-emerges, back to the moment of leaving yourself at the door.

Roberta

As Carol is attempting to warm up the workshop participants to beginning our session, I realise in that moment that I am a baby in response to the mothers and fathers of psychodrama training who are present. Looking around there is no mirror or symbolism for me as Maori. I realise that my Maori-ness has fled out the door.

In that moment there is nothing more truthful than the truth. However, we are in the roles of the director.

Director as Protagonist

Roberta

I look in Carol's eyes and I see fear. This re-connects me to my kuia role (the wise woman/truth speaker) whose responsibility is manakitanga - to support and guide. I then

verbalise to the group that I have left my Maori - my cultural identity at the door. I become the protagonist.

A reversal of process ... the protagonist emerges (whilst pre-planned, however, genuinely spontaneous) and we work against the cultural conserve of the roles of the psychodrama director. Although Clayton (1992) identifies that it is essential the director reveals aspects of themselves at the very start of the session in order to create safety for the group, there appears to be no academic evidence where it is permissible for the director or co-director to become a protagonist for the group. The cultural conserve of the director within the psychodrama world does not demonstrate this practice. In summing up the director as a leader, Feasey states, "The most appropriate leadership style of our time is that of the democratic, participating leader who is open to suggestion, who is influenced by thought and feeling from her group; one who negotiates and learns from both clients and peers and is unthreatened by the excellence of others", (2001:78).

Whilst Feasey astutely describes aspects of effective leadership within psychodrama, accredited directors however, do not appear to begin in a transparent manner to engage the group starting from their own personal life experiences.

Roberta

I display my taonga/cultural values system ... my Maunga - my mountains which symbolises strength and permanency, my Awa ... my river, where picnics, eeling, swimming and family gatherings were held, my Whenua - my land where memories are held of people past and present and my Whare - my ancestral meeting house; sheltered from the buffetings of life and where my cultural stories are told and held. I name these and call on them through a karanga (an incantation) to surround us all in the korowai (cloak) of love.

Feasey (2001) further expands that the director has to have a moral base from which to work,

which will inform her ethically, socially and psychologically in her relationships with her client group. Without a moral base the work becomes empty and meaningless.

Roberta

If in this moment I didn't see a mirror of my world then it was appropriate to recreate my world so that it can inform me and the group about my relationship with myself, my Maori world and my cultural morals. This psychodrama informed the group giving them a frame of reference. An invitation into my world. I have now arrived; everyone is alongside me in wholeness, each courageously embracing the opportunity to acknowledge their own cultural identity and shadow.

In response to Roberta's courage to fully display her innermost world from her own cultural perspective Carol's spontaneity rises - "spontaneity begets spontaneity".

Carol

The scene is set and I then lay out my recent travels to lands known but until recently unexplored... unravelling roots of the ancestors. My Scottish auntie, art degree at 77, major stroke travelling in Greenland at 81, insurance company refusal to bring her home, Edinburgh newspaper "Graduate Granny stuck in Greenland" ... Spanish: exotic, desirable, fantasy, mythical, archetypal, unknown...Irish - unknown, English - colonists; Swiss: quaint, traditionalists, stern, humorists.

Our dramas stimulated spontaneity, and provided the structure to guide the psychodrama from apparently nothing into something real not only for the person enacting the drama but also for the audience. According to Karp's understanding, we as protagonists hold the key to the inner and outer world, and as directors we hold the door which opens and closes whilst the group provided the frame (1998:149-50). If we as directors can live 'in the moment' of presenting ourselves and the purpose of the session and, further, take the time to allow this

to affect the group then the participants also take up the challenge of living in the moment.

The Meeting of Worldviews

Within a Maori cultural context in order to engage with the living it is critical to firstly evoke the *whakapapa*/genealogical connection from the *atua* (the gods/godhead) with *papatuanuku*/mother earth that sustains and nourishes the people or in this case the group. This process is known as *pepeha*/creation - and then *mihimihi*/greetings and ensures cultural safety for Maori which enables them to be fully present. It subsequently provides the platform from which relationships between group members can then occur. The linkage between the gods and ourselves is evident in this process and allows one to connect with the self, with others and with the universe. Pohatu (2003) refers to this as '*Ata whakamarama*', a principle that guides understanding and relationships. The '*Ata*' principle focuses on relationships and wellbeing, creating and holding safe space. Once this space is created then we are able to inform with reflective deliberation, ensuring that the channels of communication at the spiritual, emotional and intellectual levels of the receivers are respected, understood and valued.

On the other hand, psychodrama focuses more on developing and engaging the sociometric inter-relationships between group members as an integral part of the director's role of warming the group up to themselves, each other and their purpose for being there. However in order to co-create another reality which potentially embraces all worldviews, inclusive of identity and ethnicity, the capacity of this for psychodrama is contained within Moreno's vision for a spontaneous world in which people would live and work creatively together with a high degree of positive mutuality and group cohesion. He wrote in his book, *Who Shall Survive*, that, "a truly therapeutic procedure cannot have less an objective than the whole of mankind," (1993:3).

Furthermore, he urged that, "each group

session should have no lesser objective than world peace." (ibid)

As many of the world's conflicts are created by cultural supremacy, misunderstanding and intolerance this is a critical to both the psychodramatic world and survival of humankind.

Conclusion

In planning for this session, we as co-directors chose to integrate traditional Maori practices with Morenian application of the psychodrama method by including each director as a protagonist early in the group. Whilst this challenges the cultural conserve of the director's role it enabled the co-directors and the group to more fully warm up to the theme and purpose for this session. As trainee directors, it also prevented fragmentation occurring in the directors' warm up through self-identification of the impact of marginalisation and oppression on their functioning. It also allowed us to be less 'frozen' in face of the expertise of trainers present in the group and encouraged mirroring of a co-creative response from the group members.

From a production perspective, this process is encompassed by Karp's statement which reinforces the notion that, "*Equality of status should be established, that is, every member of the group is equal. Each presents themselves according to what he or she is and with whatever life warm up has occurred. The director is at the beginning of creation, naive, fresh, discovering and being co-responsible for each new moment. Here is where spontaneity begets spontaneity. If the director is free and easy then the sense of anything can happen, anything is possible is communicated, the group feels free to create moments together rather than passively attending a play,*" (Karp et al, 1998:155).

As co-leaders we were able to adequately live in the moment and in so doing our relationship is alive in the group. This is no less true when working across cultures and stereotypes. The ongoing challenge for the psychodrama

community, if it is to truly embrace Moreno's vision for the world, is for us to continue to explore and challenge our own cultural conserves by finding means and ways of embracing humanity in all of its cultural diversity.

**Kei te mihi ki a koutou whanau ki
te hapaitia tenei mahi**

We acknowledge those who have assisted us in writing this article. To Helen Phelan, whose tears gave us the courage to begin; Bronwen Pelvin whose enthusiasm gave us the impetus to keep going and to Rollo Browne whose insight provided the glue to bring this all together, we send our love.

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