

Taking Leadership of the Soul: Julie takes charge

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KEY WORDS

creativity, cultural conserve, concretisation, enactment, JL Moreno, God, leadership, Moreno, role reversal, soul, surplus reality, systems theory, transformation

This article, using extracts from Jennifer Callanan's Psychodrama Thesis, shares a *glimpse into the complete work*, "*Taking Leadership of the Soul. Revitalising leadership development through psychodrama's experiential learning approach*," completed in June 2023.

Introduction

This article is founded on J.L. Moreno's vision that the psychodramatic method can be instrumental in social and cultural transformation in a range of settings beyond the purely clinical and therapeutic and presents one such example of his expansive vision, that is, the use of psychodramatic techniques to generate experiential learning in the field of leadership development. It addresses the question: How might psychodrama's experiential learning approach help to revitalise the sphere of leadership development and assist individuals to better integrate their innate leadership capacities and re-energise the cultural conserves within which they work? The article proposes that a Morenian approach is ideally suited to this purpose in that it values and works with the lived experience of learners, generating integrated development and beyond that, inner transformation, and yes, ultimately leadership of the soul. In this regard, Thomson (1997, pp. 8–9), Elizabeth (1999, p. 7), Jones (2005, p. 41) and Abbott (2006 p. 56) remind us that Moreno is part of the mystical tradition, that his philosophy encompasses a deep sense of the spiritual. "The essence of our existence is a craving to create — not in the intellectual sense, but as a dynamic force, a flow of creativity. The quintessence of this spark of creativity is God." (Moreno, 1941, p. xiii).

While the context of this article is leadership development with secondary school teachers, it is important to note that the application of Morenian principles and practices is relevant to the revitalisation of

leadership development in many settings, and indeed more widely, in many arenas of adult education. Overall, my intention is to demonstrate some of the ways in which psychodrama can bring greater vitality, life and depth to leadership development, where the work takes place more consistently at the level of inner transformation rather than as part of a programme as such. To support this intention, the article presents and discusses a psychodramatic enactment in which leadership development participants learn experientially and integrate thinking, feeling and acting. We see them experimenting with real-life leadership situations, enhancing their abilities to more easily recognise the institutional systems in which they work, creating and integrating new responses to old situations, expanding their leadership visions and becoming more conscious of their own instinctive capacities as leaders, whether it be personal or positional leadership. We will also find them revitalising cultural conserves and affecting desirable social and cultural change in their workplaces.

A broad perspective on leadership is another important theme in the article. I propose that everyone is a potential leader, whether officially designated or not, because everyone has intrinsic leadership capacities that may emerge in certain contexts, and which can be further developed. The illustration below focuses on an individuals' experience of and warm-up to leadership, specifically fresh responses to old situations, which deepens their leadership capacity and revitalises the professional cultural conserves in which they work.

Julie Takes Charge

This illustration is drawn from my private practice facilitating professional leadership development. I was engaged to implement a programme titled Learning to Lead, in which teachers at a secondary college would learn more about their functioning as leaders in the daily life of the school and develop their leadership capacities. I intended to use psychodrama and was aware that I would need to become a highly active director as the participants had no experience of the method.

During the warm-up phase of the first session, I invited participants to express themselves regarding the factors that attracted them to attend the programme. Julie was one of the first to speak, recounting her recent interstate move to take up a new position as Coordinator of Curriculum at the college. She described her initial anxiety and subsequent negative experience when entering the school staffroom for the first time, specifically her feelings of vulnerability on being told that she could not sit in an empty chair at a table because it was saved for someone else. She also expressed disbelief at the rudeness and lack of welcome by the teachers at that table and, in that moment, doubted her decision to take up her new leadership role.

The other participants listened intently and then gasped at Julie's

narration, with one expressing a lack of awareness and feelings of shame in failing to be proactive in welcoming new colleagues. Another shared her embarrassment about sitting at the same table with the same people week after week, oblivious to the needs of other staff members. Julie's recall also warmed up group members to their own experiences of unspoken adverse staff relationships and negative staffroom politics and, as this theme emerged, Julie became the protagonist for the group and stepped onto the psychodrama stage.

Director: Julie, are you willing to set out this scene here and now.

Julie: Yes.

Director: Set out the scene and choose auxiliaries to be the relevant people in the staffroom.

Julie creates the staffroom, with tables, chairs and a tea-making bench. She sets out a specific table with four chairs and chooses three auxiliaries as the teachers, Anne, Joan and Petra, who come forward and seat themselves on three of the chairs.

Director: Now create the staffroom entrance and place yourself there.

Julie creates the staffroom entrance using chairs, broom handles and cloths as props, and stands at the entrance. She is still and silent, gazing into the staffroom with puzzled longing eyes.

Director: (standing slightly behind Julie, adopting her body posture and doubling her) I hope someone talks with me. I am so nervous I can hardly speak. They all seem to know each other. I wish I was back in my previous school.

Julie nods in response to the doubling. Having spotted the spare chair at the table where Anne, Joan and Petra are seated, she walks into the staffroom towards that empty chair and addresses Anne.

Julie: Hi Anne. Is it okay if I sit here?

Director: Reverse roles.

Julie as Anne: No, this seat is already taken.

Director: Reverse roles.

Julie: Oh.

Director: (doubling Julie) Oh my gosh! What do I do now? I want to fall into a hole.

Julie: (turning towards the director) That's exactly right. I wanted to

be swallowed up and disappear. Others at the table didn't even look up, and I froze, and I couldn't even look around at other tables. Not very friendly here.

Julie then recalls the school values embedded in a decorative poster that is displayed on the walls of every room in the school. These values, she reports, include respect, inclusion, welcoming and action for justice.

Director: (doubling Julie) I sure don't feel respected in this setting. Not much welcome around here.

Julie stands, silently nodding in response to this doubling.

Director: Reverse roles with Anne.

Julie: (hesitating, turning to the director) I don't know much about Anne or any of them for that matter.

As Julie is uncertain, I proceed to enact each of the teachers as I imagine them to be.

Director as Anne: Wow, this newbie looks confident, attractive and alive. I was like that once.

Director as Joan: My relationships are so shaky with the people around me. I'm not risking her disturbing things.

Director as Petra: This is our table, has been for years. Julie observes the three auxiliaries enacting these roles.

Director: What do you make of Anne and the others now?

Julie: Wow! I hadn't thought all of that could be going on in their heads. And, oh my goodness, it's got nothing to do with me. It's not about me. It's all about their own insecurities.

She smiles.

Director: Absolutely. Walk around the stage and make a soliloquy, expressing out loud what you are now thinking and feeling.

Without hesitation, Julie walks around the stage and soliloquises.

Julie: I feel so relieved. I sure was duped by this lot and almost reduced to tears. I was doubting my capacity as a human being, let alone as a professional. Far out. What a rude bunch.

Director: Express yourself to the group at the table.

The protagonist turns to the group of teachers at the table.

Julie: Call yourselves Christian. No way! All I wanted to do was sit

down and have a cup of tea. I will never end up like you lot!
(pauses) Gosh, what a relief. So good to realise that other people too have so much going on and it has nothing to do with me. What a wake-up call!

Director: Let's replay the scene.

Julie: Yes, let's do it.

Julie returns to the staffroom doorway, where she stands tall, takes a breath and walks in. She asks Anne if she can sit in the empty chair and Anne responds as before.

Julie: Hi Anne. Is it okay if I sit here?

Anne: No, this seat is already taken.

Julie: Oh, ok, no problem.

Julie quickly turns and walks towards the staffroom bench, makes herself a cup of tea and finds a seat on the other side of the room. Her face appears soft, and her posture is relaxed.

Director: Come out of the scene and choose someone to be you in this new moment.

The protagonist responds and chooses Helen as the auxiliary to be Julie.

Director to Helen: Pick up the scene at the beginning, standing at the staffroom door.

The auxiliaries re-enact the scene, with Helen as Julie moving and expressing herself as Julie has done in the new moment. I stand with Julie as she observes. A smile spreads over her face and warmth appears in her eyes.

Director to Julie: Express yourself to Julie now.

Julie to Helen as Julie: Go girl! You are in charge of yourself. You haven't fallen into a hole. Their reactions are not about you. It's all about them. Such a relief.

Director: Reverse roles.

The auxiliary repeats Julie's words, and Julie stands there listening, nodding and smiling.

Discussion

In this scenario, Morenian methods again helped to generate an experiential learning approach to leadership development. Through the concepts and techniques of scene-setting, concretisation, doubling, soliloquy, surplus

reality and mirroring, the protagonist warmed up to her inner authority and leadership capacity in an everyday moment at work, which was consistent with the purpose of the programme. The following discussion will specifically address doubling, soliloquy, surplus reality and mirroring as they were used to good effect in the enactment, with a section on the revitalisation of the cultural conserve also included.

Doubling

Doubling was a powerful element that assisted the protagonist to warm up to progressive functioning. To begin with, as the protagonist stood at the staffroom door endeavouring to enter into her experience, I, as the double, adopted her body posture and expressed what I imagined to be her thoughts and feelings. Her nod indicated that she accepted the doubling and experienced companionship, validation and freedom to continue with the exploration. As Clayton (1992, p. 83) maintains, "After a double has been accepted it is possible for them (the protagonist) to express themselves with greater freedom and to explore through dialogue how the protagonist wishes to be, what the protagonist wants to do and say, and what their life goals are." Further instances of doubling such as, "Oh my gosh! What do I do now? I want to fall into a hole," and "I sure don't feel respected in this setting. Not much welcome around here," continued to assist the protagonist to express herself with greater freedom, explore what she wanted to be, do and say, and warm up to her values and life goals. As well, the imagined enactment of the three colleagues assisted the protagonist to recognise that they were functioning in habitual coping roles, thus allowing her to free herself from the social system and take charge of herself. This was the protagonist's aha moment, which she expressed with a knowing smile: "Oh my goodness, it's got nothing to do with me. ... It's all about their own insecurities."

Soliloquy

The Morenian technique of soliloquy assisted the protagonist to develop a new progressive warm-up to herself and the culture in which she was immersed. Moreno (1946/1994, p. 194) describes soliloquy as a technique that brings "deeper levels of our inner-personal world to expression. ... It is used by the patient (sic) to duplicate hidden feelings and thoughts which he (sic) actually had in a situation ... or in the moment of performance." When directed to walk around the stage and soliloquise, this protagonist spontaneously expressed her hidden feelings and thoughts with a strong voice and uninhibited movement. The value of soliloquy thus lies in the expression of truthfulness. In this case, the protagonist voiced relief after expressing her true experience: "I feel so relieved. ... I was doubting my capacity as a human being, let alone as a professional." The soliloquy also

assisted her to warm up to the roles of confident social analyst, spontaneous self-respecting leader and courageous truth-teller. When directed to enter surplus reality and express herself, the protagonist embodied these roles as she turned to her colleagues at the table and viewed them as if for the first time: “So good to realise that other people too have so much going on and it has nothing to do with me.”

Surplus Reality

Surplus reality is a foundational Morenian concept, whereby the subject is provided “with a new and more extensive experience of reality, a surplus reality” (Moreno, 1953/197, p. 85). Moreno and Moreno (1969/1975, pp. 15-16) describe surplus reality as “the intangible, invisible dimensions of intra- and extra-psychic life, dimensions in the reality of living not fully experienced or expressed.” Blatner (1988, p. 70) observes that, in surplus reality “the protagonist presents not only what happened in reality, but more importantly, what may never have actually occurred except in his (sic) fantasy.” And as Jones (2017, p. 149) remarks, “Many of us have had life experiences ... that were not fully or adequately expressed at the time ... we develop coping strategies that isolate us from others. We forget we are creative beings with many capacities.”

The protagonist in this enactment did experience and express intangible dimensions of her life, of which she had not been fully aware: “What a rude bunch. ... Call yourselves Christian. ... I will never end up like you lot.” In the production of this moment, her experience of surplus reality may have felt unreal, but it was central to her warming up more fully to her true feelings, responding adequately and recognising that “we can learn to overcome old imperatives ... and instead express heartfelt truth and simply be ourselves.” (Logeman, 2019, p. 37). Similarly, Watersong (2008, p. 13) maintains that “The freedom from all ordinary conventions in the surplus reality enactment is one of the unique therapeutic potentials of psychodrama”, which “enables the protagonist to find new strength, creativity and integration.” In re-enacting the scene, the protagonist entered the staffroom with a new warm-up to herself and those present. In this moment, she experienced a sense of freedom, remembered her creative capacity and found new strength and integration.

Mirroring

The psychodramatic technique of mirroring assisted the protagonist to see herself anew, as if in a mirror, and subsequently warm up to new roles. Moreno (1953/1978, p. 723) theorises that “The real purpose of the (mirror) technique is to let the patient see himself (sic) ‘as in a mirror,’ provoke him (sic) and shock him (sic) into action.” Clayton (1992, p. 27) describes the execution of the mirror this way: “A group member /s, whom we term the

auxiliary/auxiliaries portrays what he (sic) observes the protagonist doing. This auxiliary virtually repeats what the protagonist has already said and done." He maintains that the benefits of a protagonist observing an auxiliary adequately portraying an aspect of their functioning are many, including "the more rapid increase in the spontaneity level of the protagonist through experiencing the spontaneity of the auxiliary in the form of adequate, accurate expression."

In this enactment, an auxiliary mirrored the protagonist's movement and expression as she took a breath, walked into the staffroom, asked to sit in an empty chair and on being denied, calmly moved to make a cup of tea and seat herself on the other side of the room with soft expression and relaxed posture. In observing the auxiliary's adequate mirroring of what might be named the role of a confident free spirit, the protagonist experienced a rapid increase in spontaneity. Furthermore, as Reekie (1997, p. 11) describes, "the protagonist stands with the producer not only to observe the mirroring but to engage in an encounter with herself or himself." In this case, the protagonist smiled warmly and then encountered herself, enacting the roles of enthusiastic cheerleader and perceptive coach: "Go girl! You are in charge of yourself. You haven't fallen into a hole. Their reactions are not about you. It's all about them." In the words of Reekie (1997, p. 12), the experience of mirroring "enhanced the protagonist's awareness of self and assisted the development of creativity and the expansion of progressive functioning." This was thinking, feeling and action integrated, truly experiential learning.

Revitalising the Cultural Conserve

The protagonist initially presented herself as a clear-thinking courageous adventurer with a vision for her immediate future. She was confronted with unfriendly colleagues, who seemed unconsciously bound up in an outmoded cultural conserve. Clayton (1989, p. 68) proposes that "the cultural conserve is anything that preserves the values of a particular culture." The protagonist experienced disillusionment when this encounter fell short of her expectations and was not congruent with the school ethos. In his *Canon of Creativity*, Moreno (1953/1978, p. 46) maintains that "Conserves would accumulate indefinitely and remain 'in cold storage'." It seemed that this staffroom culture was in cold storage, that the teachers' functioning was limited by the unspoken norms of the group. Moreno continues, "They (conserves) need to be reborn; the catalyzer Spontaneity revitalizes them." On first encountering the values of this cold-stored staffroom culture, the protagonist also became frozen and lost contact with her visionary adventurer. However, through the enactment, she re-connected with her spontaneity and became the catalyzer who revitalised the cultural conserve of the college's staffroom.

Julie Grows as a Leader

In a subsequent session, Julie reported newfound strength, creativity and role integration when chairing faculty meetings. She began to mentally role reverse with participants prior to each meeting and noted, with delight, her embodiment of the developing roles of astute social analyst, curious cultural anthropologist and confident spontaneous leader, a leader in charge of herself. She described the resulting positive effect of her progressive leadership functioning on the college's cultural conserve. She noted that staffroom seating arrangements began to "loosen up" and that her team members warmed up more positively towards one another and the business at hand.

As for me, Julie's report confirmed the conviction that I had developed, psychodrama's experiential learning methods were more effective and integrative than traditional approaches, bringing greater vitality and life, indeed revitalisation to the field of leadership development.

An important implication is the need for leadership development practitioners to become highly active when using the Morenian method. As in most adult education groups, participants will have little or no experience of psychodrama. This requires a high degree of active guidance on the part of the leader and director. Initially, during the warm-up stage, the development of trust between the director and participants is paramount. A brief overview of the three phases of a psychodrama enactment and the role of the director will assist group members to warm up to the session. The director is required to actively guide the protagonist through each phase and coach them when they are enacting the various psychodramatic techniques for the first time, as well as actively coaching the auxiliaries. There will be times when the director is required to become an active double or mirror rather than asking naïve participants to take on these functions.

Conclusion

The word education comes from the Latin, meaning to bring forth that which is within. This is indeed what the Morenian approach does, and it is just this valuing of the lived experience of participants that leads to integrated development and beyond that, internal transformation as individuals become more aware of and develop their innate capacities as leaders and yes, take leadership of their souls.

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