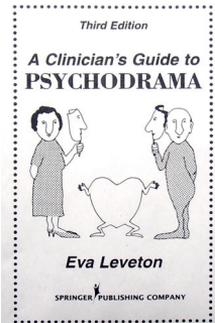


Book Reviews



A Clinician's Guide to Psychodrama

by Eva Leveton
Third Edition,
Springer Publishing Company,
New York, 2001

Reviewed by Suzanne Wallace

My interest in this book was aroused as soon as I opened the front pages and scanned the contents page. I was instantly alerted that this might be the simple guide to psychodrama that I had always wanted. I reflected on my experiences many years ago, as a beginner psychodrama trainee, when I began experiential training with no understanding of the basic methods underpinning the action. At that time I would have benefited from having available a clear and simple guide to the method. Later, as a beginning clinician, I lacked a simple, straightforward text for reference on a day-to-day basis, both for my own guidance and for the education of students and other staff in the hospital in which I worked. Many years later, as an experienced clinician, I would still value such a guide. As a trainer, I would value a textbook to provide relevant, excellent and enlivening ideas and information to trainees. The book by Leveton appeared to be just the one that might meet all of these needs and I was delighted to read it.

In the prologue Leveton describes her reason for writing her book. "My goal is to provide the reader with an informal compendium of psychodramatic techniques and to describe in some detail, my style in applying them." (p x) This is an accurate description of her work. Leveton commences her book with an account of her own introduction to psychodrama. Leveton, a psychologist, describes herself as having been a highly skeptical and timid novice, a situation that is familiar to myself and, I believe, many others. She then describes her work in a day treatment centre, in a psychiatric ward, in family therapy, with individuals including indigenous American Indians. In all these settings she endeavored to introduce psychodrama, believing in its healing qualities. Leveton also combined psychodrama with her interests in trance and drama therapy.

Key concepts and relationship to Morenean theory and practice

Leveton's book outlines, in simple straightforward language, the main techniques used in classical psychodrama as envisioned by Moreno. The first two chapters

introduce the beginning stages of running a group, addressing issues of authority and seating. Chapters describing warm up, the double, role reversal, the sociogram, the empty chair and closure follow. Leveton then includes several special interest chapters, including character studies, issues related to personality, scene making, magic shop, masks, spontaneity and dealing with resistance. Two chapters are devoted to clarifying differences between trance and psychodrama and between psychodrama and drama therapy. She concludes her book with a chapter outlining three case studies and provides a very helpful glossary.

Appraisal of the content

The first chapter deals with authority and the second addresses seating arrangements. These very important issues are usually only briefly touched on in books describing psychodrama or group therapy. However, they are crucial to the formation of a group and are especially essential topics for the new group leader. It is a delight to see them included here and given space for detailed consideration.

The third chapter addresses warm up. Leveton commences this chapter by candidly relating her experiences as a novice clinician and details the methods and benefits of warm-up, providing many examples of practical application. I was particularly delighted that she gave examples of her work in difficult environments, such as an acute psychiatric ward, rather than only describing work with community groups or professionals who were largely psychologically intact. Following this, Leveton provides a practical compendium of ideas and instructions for verbal and non-verbal warm up activities. For each activity Leveton provides a step-by-step instruction, including directions and discussion. Some of these activities may be familiar, some new. However, the generosity of Leveton in giving these to the reader is a real gift to the learner and expert alike.

The fourth chapter addressing doubling is also a generous gift. As with the previous chapter on warm up, Leveton describes her personal experiences with doubling, gives an explanation of doubling and follows this with an instructional compendium of styles. The styles include the neutral double, the humorous double and the oppositional double. She then describes methods of making the double a physical entity, the double as counselor, the collective double and the stubborn double. The last part of this very useful chapter addresses the issue of doubling as an adjunct to therapy. The rest of the chapters follow the same constructive, comprehensive and helpful pattern, with Leveton not only providing simple to understand, helpful explanations, but also practical suggestions that may be immediately implemented.

There were two disappointments. The first is that Leveton did not include an account of Moreno's role theory. I feel that this is a grave omission. It may lead the reader to assume that the practical techniques so well described by Leveton amount to the "whole story" and that one may practice psychodrama techniques

with no need for deeper understanding. A chapter with a summary of the main points of Moreno's theory would have been helpful and made this book much more complete as a reference. The second omission is that Leveton fails to mention the role of group process in the conducting of a psychodrama group. This is also a serious omission as the beginner clinician or trainee may not realise the power of group process as a force influencing the group. This book would have been more complete if it mentioned the role of group process in the formation and ongoing journey of a group. There is a reading list provided at the end of the book but again there is no mention of group process and little on Moreno's role theory. However, these omissions can be overcome with additional reading.

Conclusions

Is this the simple guide to psychodrama that I had always wanted? Yes, in part. Leveton has met her goal of providing an informal compendium of psychodramatic techniques and describing her style in applying them. With the caution that additional reading is required, particularly regarding Moreno's role theory and theories of group process, I recommend *A Clinician's Guide to Psychodrama* (Third Edition) by Eva Leveton. Those who would enjoy this book and benefit from its many ideas are clinicians working with the psychodrama method, trainers, trainees, students of the method and those who wish for a succinct, informative guide to practical day-to-day leadership of a psychodrama group. I recommend this book as a source of inspiration for those times when creativity seems to have flown out of the door and there is a need for a concise manual of ideas to stimulate and inspire.



Suzanne Wallace has worked as an Occupational Therapist in acute inpatient Psychiatry since 1982. She was awarded a Churchill Fellowship in 1992 for her work with young women suffering eating disorders. Trained as a Psychodramatist and T.E.P., Suzanne is interested in all aspects of spiritual endeavour and experience. She lives with her dog, Teddy, in Perth, Western Australia.