

Seizing the Moment

The dramatic impact of role training

by Mike Consedine

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The real beauty of the psychodramatic method is perhaps its ability to create a moment of high drama ... a moment in which fundamental roles in the protagonist's life are captured and displayed with such clarity and with such impact that all present are affected and fully engaged. A moment when the central conflict in the protagonist's functioning is present and exposed for all to see. A moment when it seems that the very life of the protagonist is on display. A moment of great beauty, a moment of great insight and a moment of great truth.

Although moments of great truth and great insight occur in a variety of encounters, the psychodramatic method is unique. It allows us to concretise and display such moments for all to see. Further, this concretisation enables us to maintain the dramatic impact through time. We are thus able to heighten the impact of the moment itself such that we become more consciously aware and more appreciative.

Often such moments emerge quite suddenly and a high level of spontaneity and an instant response

are required to capture and make the most of them. One such moment occurred recently in a role training session with Quentin. The role analysis which followed supported and substantiated the director's spontaneous intervention. The

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analysis was conducted by the group using further enactment, mirroring and discussion. It revealed roles in Quentin such as anxious anticipator, profit of doom, angry rejector, and perhaps centrally, anxious pleaser. The roles in Jenny, the other person in the interaction were flustered superwoman, tight-rope walker,

inducer of guilt, frazzled paper-shuffler, and centrally, belligerent rejector. The group strongly believed that Quentin's conflicted warm-up was a response, not to any one role in Jenny, but to the total role constellation which she demonstrated.

Quentin had stated that he wanted to address some of his dysfunction in relation to a senior supervisor. He set up a situation where he as duty officer was required to allocate incoming requests for assistance in a welfare agency. Quentin's task was to take down the details of the incoming request for assistance and allocate it to one of the teams. There were three teams each headed up by a senior supervisor who then decided how to allocate the request within her team.

On this day all of the teams were very busy. Quentin had already allocated incoming requests to two of the teams. A third request had just come in. Jenny, the third supervisor, was the person with whom he had the greatest difficulty. He knew that she was extremely busy, frazzled, stressed, almost frantic. In the enactment he portrayed her on her knees in her office going through piles and piles of paper spread all over the floor and simultaneously talking to her manager on the telephone. He had toyed with the idea of allocating this request to one of the other teams but knew that he could not get away with this.

Knowing how busy she was he didn't like the fact that he had to take this request to her. He knew what her response would be but as duty officer he was also well aware of the protocol. He approached her office door. Just as he raised his hand to knock the director called: "Freeze!" and then invites the group

to observe Quentin closely.

It was an amazing moment. A dramatic moment. There for all to see, encapsulated and projected through every cell of Quentin's being was the conflict and its associated roles. There was a silence in the group. Almost a breathlessness – each person in full appreciation of that which was displayed. It was a moment of high dramatic impact and one which stayed with the group long after the drama had moved on to a resolution and the emergence of a new role. It was sheer poetry. Dramatic theatre at its very best.

Such moments of high dramatic impact are relatively common in the psychodramatic method. The conscious realisation of them in the group is relatively less common. The effect on the group is almost palpable. There is a commonality of experience which profoundly deepens the warm up of the group to each other and to the work of the group. There is a realisation that change is possible. There is a lessening of shame and a greater willingness to be seen.

But there is more – somehow a more conscious appreciation of the human condition informs each group member. We are more accepting, more appreciative, more respectful and more generous. We are soft with each other. We are no longer isolated. There is movement towards communion. We are all somehow more in touch with the commonalities of our existence – the essence of our nature. We are forever changed by this moment.