

Principles of Psychodrama Training

by Paul Baakman

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INTRODUCTION

The Spirit of Adaptation

At the time of writing I have been watching a BBC documentary, called 'The Planets'. The program makes it clear that toward the end of the Sun's life it will greatly expand and finally explode. This means 'curtains' for Earth. We may find temporary refuge on other planets, but ultimately we will need to look to the stars for a new home. A bit of a challenge perhaps, but we have about one billion years. Perhaps we will take off with a 'Noah's Ark' of genetic codes, enabling us to conserve Earth's life forms. Perhaps creativity in science will enable us to adapt to alien environments. We surely will need all the creativity and spontaneity that we can muster, and it is just as well that we have some time up our sleeves!

We have the potential to destroy the planet many times over. To survive and flourish instead of perish, we need models and methods that reflect and support the wish to sustain and develop life. One such method is the psychodrama method, which has a theory of spontaneity and creativity at its core.

J.L. Moreno had a grand vision for psychodrama. He said, "A truly therapeutic procedure cannot have less an objective than the whole of mankind." (Moreno, 1993: 3) A true systems thinker, Moreno saw all of life interconnected. He was adamant we should have a system of society in which everyone has a place. He believed that the effect of excluding one person could be immensely destructive, (note the recent spate of high school shooting sprees in the USA: it appears the killer usually is socially isolated).

The Systemic Principle of Inclusion

Moreno's thoughts about inclusion are applicable, not only to individuals, but also to groups within society. This is of particular relevance to New Zealand and Australia, both countries with a colonial past during which the earlier people were overrun. 'Inclusion' does not equal submission to the dominant culture. It means partnership, respect and dialogue, and a genuine attempt to heal the rift that arose through conquest and genocide. Bob and Joanna Consedine (2001:226), put this vision forward: "History verifies over and over again that the human spirit is capable of much more than self interest. There is innate fairness, generosity and grandeur in every human being that has the capacity to reach out and respond to the demands of justice and the common good. The task of every human being is to improve society".

In harmony with the above is the vision put forward by ANZPA's Board of Examiners, in the Training and Standards Manual (1993:2): "the vision is of able men and women all over the place expressing themselves relevantly in the ordinary here and now situations in which they live and work. This expression may be in silence, in building, in planning, in negotiating, in teaching, or in play, but it will be a responsive and creative expression that brings joy to the human spirit, that uplifts the soul, that makes us feel part of the universe again".

This article identifies six principles that undergird a training program and illustrates these using personal experiences and practices. In developing these principles, a central interest has been to make sure they reflect the spirit of adaptation and the systemic principle of inclusion. I also focus

on the need to integrate a personal vision, a creative plan and a developmental model with experiential learning. I illustrate how the psychodrama method itself is applied in the process of training in psychodrama, and how the training takes place in a larger context.

These principles of training represent an overview of the main ideas and values that currently underpin my philosophy and practice of training. I have developed these ideas in collaboration with my trainers and colleagues. They are constantly tested through practice and they are evolving.

PRINCIPLES OF PSYCHODRAMA TRAINING

The training journey is greatly enhanced when the trainee's personal sense of purpose is congruent and integrated with the psychodrama method

Those trainees who go all the way to certification will, at some point, need to examine how to weave the method in with their personal vision. For me this was a gradual process. I was raised in the Roman Catholic tradition, which mostly I found thoroughly uninspiring. However, some aspects of the faith I still value today. These are the music, the singing, the magnificent works in stained glass, and some of the parables. Something that was emphasised, (and which is still with me) is a sense of social responsibility. Although this sometimes went no further than being encouraged to engage in charitable works, I did hear and read of 'heroes' like the bishops and priests working in Central America, putting themselves on the line and aligning themselves with the voiceless and the oppressed. These stories resonated strongly within me.

During my early teenage years, I developed a passionate longing for adventure and the exotic. I would walk along a forest path and imagine strange lands and wondrous happenings. (I now see these daydreams as a womb for my then embryonic roles of emigrant and dramatist). These early experiences are at the roots of my personal vision for a world that can progress, and is sustainable.

When the time came to choose an occupation I felt equally attracted to social work and drama school. I choose to train as a residential social worker and later as a psychiatric nurse. During my initial training, I took part in an elective, which was a 'sensitivity training workshop'. This stirred me, as it made me see what was made possible through inspired group work.

Many years later, during my training as a psychiatric nurse, I enrolled for a psychodrama workshop organised by Mike Consedine and directed by Wayne Scott. This was a revelation for me and reminded me of my early passion for group methods. I took to it like a duck to water. I finally had found something that enabled me to creatively combine my desire for 'working with people for an improved world' (therapeutic work), with my longing for 'adventure and the exotic' (drama).

A Focus on Human Possibilities

The psychodrama method is an inclusive process that encourages people to be all that they can be. Rather than learning to live within one's limitations, people are inspired to live to the full extent of their possibilities. This is a departure from a pre-occupation with illness, dysfunction or pathology. Psychodrama has a focus on creativity, and training in this method, directly

and indirectly, contributes to society's opportunities to endure and flourish. This is in line with my personal vision for a sustainable and progressive world.

Possibilities in the Training Process

To assist the process of training people to become psychodramatists, we must first ask how a training group can endure and flourish. The application of a set of guiding principles is one way of ensuring this. The application of the psychodrama method itself to the training process is a tremendous strength in the ANZPA culture, and ensures training is purposeful. Apart from what is taught, also how the training is delivered provides trainees with another source of learning.

The training, when guided by a creative plan, is purposeful and effective

In developing a creative plan the trainer warms up to imagination and innovation. The training that follows will be imbued with dynamism and novelty, and trainees will get in touch with their love of learning. Training without a creative plan is likely to be experienced, by trainer and trainee alike, as lacklustre, reactive, robotic, and all over the place.

A Creative and Flexible Plan

A creative and flexible plan draws inspiration from the Training and Standards Manual, and takes into account the warm-up created by the curriculum.

ANZPA's Training and Standards Manual is an inspirational document that enables trainers and trainees to monitor development more clearly. It also provides a reference

point for those trainees who wish to present for assessment.

In addition to this the staff at the Christchurch Institute for Training in Psychodrama have developed a curriculum which guides the planning of training. The first step in creating a training plan is to assess the training group - its composition, age and gender distribution, professional backgrounds, training history, and areas of interest indicated by trainees. A flexible plan takes into account the developing warm-up of the group. However, when working with a training group I am always ready to adjust, or sometimes abandon, the plan.

Planning is essential for the warm-up of the trainer. Without a plan, training is haphazard, and the focus of training depends on the luck of the draw. In such a situation the trainer is at risk of merging with the group, in deference to what may seem like a 'spontaneous' agenda. Moreno (1993: 11) made a distinction between spontaneity and impulsivity, by emphasising that spontaneity is the catalyst for creativity, and that spontaneity without creativity makes for "spontaneous idiots".

Training without a plan can lead to lopsided development, and trainees remain with significant gaps in their learning and development. Trainees often are anxious about being in the role of director. The apparent absence of a plan may fuel this anxiety. In response to a lack of leadership, a training group may revert to Bion's (1961) 'basic assumption' mode, and become immobilised by dependence, torn apart by fight/flight, or seek salvation in pairing.

Creating Conditions in Which Opportunities for Learning may Unexpectedly Emerge

Too much of a focus on formal requirements can stifle the very spontaneity we aim to promote. In every training group, events take place that provide material for training or teaching purposes. When a trainer makes use of these 'golden moments', the training has a relevance to the here-and-now experience of group members. Connecting the training with real-life events in the group, adds a significant quality to the learning. The here-and-now event has trainees warmed up not only to their thinking, but also to their feelings and actions and relationships to each other. Teaching or training at this point has immediate relevance, is anchored to an experience and is therefore more readily integrated and remembered. This counters tendencies toward intellectualisation and may avert boredom and detachment. This method of training creates links between theory and real life, models 'learning through experience', and as such is of great practical value to trainees ready to apply the method to their life and work.

Readiness

Having established the need for a creative plan, an immediate challenge arises. Trainees neither develop along a straight path, nor move forward at the same tempo as everyone else. In this sense, every training group is a multi-level training group, and a training plan is designed with this in mind. The plan needs to have sufficient flexibility built in to allow deviations from a linear route towards completion of requirements.

The trainer displays respect for the trainee in considering the trainee's readiness to learn about a particular matter or develop a certain

role. This respect enhances a warm-up to adult-to-adult functioning in both trainer and trainees.

Also as James Masterson (1988:208) states: "Not all individuals have the same capacity for creativity, of course, since it, like all other capacities, is a product of both nature and nurture, of genetic inheritance and developmental encouragement".

Flexibility

Rigidity in holding on to a training plan is contrary to the spirit of spontaneity and creativity, and does not take into account the warm-up or ability of the individual trainee or the training group. I picture cloned units, identical and 'correct' directors, technically perfect but without a soul, would emerge in response to this rigidity. Trainees with an obsessive streak in their make-up might feel reassured by a tight program, but their entrenched coping strategy remains unchallenged. Flexibility is one of the key aspects of spontaneity, and this helps a trainer to adapt to the real needs of the trainee or group.

A Changing Culture

There are further reasons to emphasise flexibility in the training program. Flexibility is of high value in processes involving change. Psychodrama training takes place in a culture that is changing rapidly. Many public as well as private organisations face under-funding or relentless bouts of 'restructuring'. More than ever the phrase 'ongoing change is here to stay' seems to apply.

In the mental health field, large numbers of disturbed and/or distressed people are kept out of institutions, and referred to 'community care'. This means they are left

in the hands of workers who often have only minimal training. The workers who remain in the institutions face a higher concentration of highly disturbed clientele. Demoralisation and burnout take their toll. The implications for our training programs include an increasing emphasis on safe practice, and on recognising the fragmenting roles that are associated with psychosis, severe depression, or suicide potential. Psychodrama is a vehicle to greater self-expression. However, it is essential to see the method also as a vehicle for containment! This is especially so in relation to working with those people who have been diagnosed as having a 'personality disorder'.

Psychodrama is a method par excellence that assists trainees and practitioners to rise to the challenge of working with disturbed individuals. In psychodrama a 'problem' is re-framed as a 'challenge to creativity'. A 'problem' orientation can lead to headaches and is joyless, however a 'challenge to creativity' is an invitation to live with zest and vitality.

Example

In individual supervision John has complained of his lack of assertiveness when faced with competition, and the impact on his development as a psychodrama director. In supervision the work proceeds at a slow pace and has a lacklustre quality, since John has difficulty with getting in touch with his feelings. In the training group an unexpected 'golden moment' arrives. Prior to the training session John has resolved that this night he will put himself forward as Director. As it turns out, a number of people express their wish for the evening before he does, and someone else ends up directing.

After a break, John suddenly bursts out in tears and says: "This is how it always goes, I always wait and then someone runs with the ball before I have even blinked, I am so sick of this!" He ends up being a protagonist in a brief drama in which he confronts the forces that are holding him back. The next training session, a week later, he is the first one to speak.

The above demonstrates that John's most effective work takes place when he is in touch with his experience. These experiences are less likely to be generated in a one-to-one session, since there is no actual competition in this setting. It took the 'here and now' event in the training group, which involved competition, for John to truly warm up to wanting to change.

Training is based on a developmental model in which the trainee is recognised as a dynamic entity, whose learning requirements evolve

Developing a new role takes time. To develop a whole set of new roles and integrate these into professional practice and daily life takes years.

We live in a society that is imbued with the values of instant gratification. Holiday now – pay later. Something doesn't work? Throw it out. Are you in emotional pain? Take a pill. Much of marketing and advertising not only stimulates but also cashes in on this trend. One particular training course I saw offered, promised 'master-practitioner' status after only 30 days of training.

Psychodrama training involves more than learning a set of skills or mastering techniques. Training is based on the understanding that roles gradually develop, and must be tested through practice in order to be strengthened and integrated. This takes time and commitment. The techniques can be taught in a weekend; the integration takes years. Some trainees new to training expect to learn a set of 'quick tricks'. Some don't last long when they discover they need to turn themselves inside out and upside-down in order to develop as psychodramatists. Others rise to the challenge and commit to an ongoing training process.

Carl Hollander (1969) noticed the same thing: "All too often neophytes to psychodrama falsely assume from a few sessions that they are adequately prepared to direct others in psychodrama".

Evolving Ideas

My ideas about education and training are evolving. In my early days of being a trainer I was more likely to focus on the 'right way' of doing things. My understanding has deepened and now I regard training as a developmental and transformational process. As a result I am much more focused on the consciousness and immediate experience of a trainee director, and the roles and role-relationships that come forward.

Grace Kennedy (2000: 9-12) contrasts three different educational approaches:

- **Transmission**

The student is seen as an empty vessel that needs to be filled. A good example of a proper application of this model is in driver education where a series of competencies have to be mastered. However, it does little

to assist people to value themselves, or how to be reflective and then active in the world.

- **Transaction**

Reform in education led to education being seen as an interactive process between the students and the curriculum. An attempt is made to link the material to the developmental ability of the student. Still, these ideas attend only to cognitive development.

- **Transformation**

The student is seen as central, positive, purposive, active and involved in organising life experiences. The experience of the learner is primary and choice, creativity, values and self-realisation are central. There is an orientation to social change and reflection upon one's actions.

Psychodrama training is in harmony with the third approach: transformation. The intensity and personal challenge inherent in the training process often does lead to transformation.

Role Development

Role development is central to training. Personal growth is a by-product of professional development. Much role development takes place in the course of training. There is a significant advantage in trainees becoming familiar with the role of protagonist and getting a first hand experience. Learning through experience means that new material can immediately begin to be integrated. A beginning director is more likely to be sensitive to

the vulnerability of the protagonist when this vulnerability has been personally experienced.

When a trainee is highly warmed-up to personal concerns then this does not need to be in conflict with the purpose of the training group. In fact, a trainer can take advantage from a trainee's warm-up. When personal and professional development are seen as complementary to each other, a link can be made between the emerging concern of the trainee as protagonist and how this relates to professional roles, and thus a professional training focus is maintained.

There are occasions when a trainee has a great deal of personal work to do. This has the potential to dominate the group or hold a trainee back from advancing. On a few occasions I have suggested to a trainee that he or she enter into personal therapy, or take part in one or more personal development workshops. This highlights the notion that not all role development needs to take place in the training group itself. Indeed, some is better done elsewhere.

Example

Mary has been in training for several years. She struggles to find her voice in the sense that she speaks softly and demurely. Despite doing several dramas with a focus on resolving this struggle she still does not breathe properly or uses the full strength of her voice. This hinders her whenever she is in auxiliary or director roles. I suggest she does singing lessons or, since she belongs to a church, joins the choir. As her trainer I am keen to see her find her voice.

Attempting to address unresolved intra-psychic conflict, in her case had led to 'going around in circles'. Joining the choir proved more effective. At choir practice she was, after all, surrounded by dozens of 'supportive doubles', and this had the effect of her feeling more accepting of herself in her effort to find her voice. The work could be done through play.

The curriculum has an emphasis on experiential learning which promotes the integration of experience with theoretical concepts and practical ability

Whereas in order to develop as a psychodramatist it is essential to read the literature or learn from lectures, this in itself cannot be enough. No one has ever obtained a driver license by watching someone else drive or attend a lecture on driving. Through being in the driver's seat a person learns about what is not known or needs to be developed. Similarly, through actually directing a drama, a trainee will learn which roles are well developed and which need further development. The 'director's role' is in fact a cluster of roles, and a director, in the course of their training needs to become exceptionally flexible and adaptable in working with protagonists from all walks of life. Learning from moment to moment in the actual 'cauldron' of a session, may counter a tendency toward intellectualisation or distancing through objectification. Directing under supervision in front of one's peers can be a challenging experience. The fact that the trainee director is likely to be emotionally aroused during a training session increases the likelihood that learning is integrated into the whole being of the trainee.

To become an effective director of psychodrama, an aspiring director needs to develop the ability to function in a great number of roles, love life, and have a genuine interest in human beings. There is an assumption that certain professional roles have already been developed, or will be developed, through tertiary study.

Further role development initially takes place through functioning as a group member, protagonist or auxiliary. This is taken into account when a curriculum is developed. The Christchurch staff collaborated in developing our curriculum over the course of several days.

Curriculum

Year One

The first year has an emphasis on experience and learning in the role of:

- Group member (to learn from self-display and sociometry in action)
- Auxiliary (to function and be facilitative in a variety of roles)
- Protagonist (to experience and develop trust in the method)

The aim is that at the end of the first year all trainees have had extensive experience of all three aspects, and have developed trust in the psychodramatic process.

Throughout training I refer to some fundamental concepts in psychodrama. I have increasingly come to see some of these as essential in the early part of training. These are: tele, sociometry, role theory and the social and cultural atom.

I see these as four vital concepts that help to provide a structure. Such a structure can assist in the building of safety in the early stages of a group, and can help in making sense of the myriad of sometimes overwhelming and confusing experiences trainees may have. All four concepts relate to roles within relationships, and relationships between roles. Consciousness of relationships and roles within relationships are of vital concern in the early development of a group, and can be used to immediate benefit in the building of a cohesive group.

Year Two

The second year sees an increasing emphasis on the role of the director. Having been challenged to display him- or herself in the first year, the trainee can lead a group-directed warm-up with greater awareness, sensitivity and effectiveness. Having been trained in auxiliary roles the trainee director is more equipped to pay proper attention to the quality of auxiliary work by group members. Having been a protagonist on a number of occasions sensitises the trainee to the experience of the protagonist. None of these beneficial effects is guaranteed. However, without these prior experiences a trainee director is more likely to function poorly (like driving a car without a map). Psychodrama is an experiential method, and the training is experiential training. Personal experiences of the method are part of the unfolding map.

Years Two and Three

The second and third years include teaching and training in role training, sociodrama and sociometry. The term 'psychodrama' is now used generically to describe these sub-modalities. Trainees have experiences of role training and sociodrama, and refine their understanding and application of sociometry

and other dramatic interventions. The emerging identity of the psychodramatist starts to be interwoven with the trainee's personal vision of his or her life's purpose.

Year Four

Year four (and beyond) has an overall focus on integrating the identity of the psychodramatist, and refinement of practice. By this time the trainee will have written, or is preparing to write, a social cultural atom paper, as well as developing a thesis topic.

Further work at this stage involves strengthening a professional identity; greater familiarisation with ANZPA's code of ethics; deepening peer relationships; maintaining authority in the presence of the trainer; further reading; and commitment to ongoing personal and professional development, as well as to supervision. Finally, the trainee prepares for assessment.

Learning is enhanced when the process and structure of training is based on the spirit of the psychodrama method

Selection of Trainees

In harmony with the spirit of psychodrama the Christchurch Institute is 'inclusive', and in principle welcomes trainees from many different backgrounds. Prospective trainees are invited to a training interview, during which clarity is gained about the suitability of a training program for a particular person. It is assumed the trainee possesses, or is working toward, a degree or equivalent qualification in their chosen field.

Discontinuance of Training

Experience over the years has shown that a good number of trainees will dip in and out

of training. Whilst some trainees have good reason to interrupt or cease training, for others it has meant ending up as 'chronically advanced', meaning that he or she is treading water but not making real headway in the swim toward certification. The Christchurch Institute has responded to this development by attempting to forge stronger relationships with trainees who come and go. We have abolished the notion of 'terms' in our training program, and have warmed the trainees up to enrolling for the whole year. However, enrolment for a 'term' is still possible in exceptional circumstances.

Ongoing Assessment

Trainers make ongoing appraisals by noticing the functioning of a trainee at every opportunity. The appraisal is based on observations of the functioning of the trainee as a director, auxiliary, protagonist and group member. Any assessment is further enriched through what transpires from a trainee's writing assignments.

The trainee's ability to self-evaluate is valued and respected, and some form of self-appraisal is part of most training sessions.

The trainee's role in social events, an Open Day, ANZPA branch meetings, and functioning within the community at large, provides further material for reflection and ongoing assessment.

Three times each year every trainee is reviewed in a meeting of training staff, where assessments are shared and processed.

Structure of a Training Session

A 'typical' training session has the following format:

- **Warm up**

In the Core Curriculum Group I am likely to opt for a director-directed warm-up. In the Advanced group I work more with a group-directed warm-up, since staying with director-directed warm-ups would encourage early dependency dynamics to persist. Advanced trainees can benefit from running complete sessions, and this may involve facilitating a group-directed warm-up too.

- **Action**

A typical scenario involves a trainee director working with a protagonist. As the trainer/supervisor I take notes. The timing and nature of my interventions depend on the developmental level of the trainee director, and the contract for supervision that is established at the start. With a trainee ready to function more independently I may not intervene during the session (unless it looks like the protagonist could be harmed through incompetence or neglect), and save my comments for the processing session. Alternatively, I may intervene throughout, and use what occurs as 'grist for the mill'. I will use doubling, mirroring, modelling, concretisation or whatever else may be useful in raising the trainee director's spontaneity and effectiveness.

- **Sharing**

This phase involves the group members relating to the protagonist personally and with emotional involvement. The purpose is to connect the protagonist with the group again in ordinary, here-and-now time, and for group members to express something of their experience to the protagonist. During this sharing phase trainee directors are encouraged to maintain their functioning as a director. Sharing time often offers excellent

opportunities for integration of new learning, and so the benefits of the earlier drama can be maximised.

A second round of sharing, this time with the director, helps trainees to shift from their identification with the protagonist to identification with the director, and brings the trainee director back into the group as a group member. This process helps trainees to shift from a protagonist-centred focus to a director-centred focus, and thereby smoothing the transition to the next stage.

- **Processing**

At times I have found it useful to have a short break between the sharing and the processing. The break helps trainees to make the shift from sharing to processing. Processing involves the trainee director, the protagonist, the auxiliaries and the group members. I avoid the word 'supervision' for this activity, as I see this term more fitting with the overseeing of actual work done outside of the training group.

- Comments from the protagonist are valued for the immediate feedback it provides for the trainee director. I discourage situations in which the protagonist is involved in extended discussions of the therapeutic effectiveness of the drama. Too much evaluation too soon, can take the protagonist away from their recent experience, and runs the risk of turning into an overly analytic session. If there is a need to discuss the more personally therapeutic aspects of the drama, or when the experience has been especially profound for the protagonist, then that person has the option of not being present for this part of the session.

- Trainee directors assess their own functioning. We engage in a discussion about the rationale for choices in direction and techniques used, including the exploration of alternatives. Sometimes trainees have a good appreciation of strengths and weaknesses in their functioning. If a trainee can identify an area of functioning that needs attention, then this is preferable to me pointing it out. As Goldman and Morrison (1984:95) observe: "when the neophyte director is aware of the missed cue or mistake before being told, he/she is less likely to repeat that error".

- The group members may ask specific questions about a scene, dramatic technique, or another intervention. Auxiliary work may be explored and refined. I encourage trainees to come up with some of their own answers. Activities may involve re-playing part of a scene, and trying out alternative interventions. This can be an ideal time for mini-teaching sessions or the introduction of a training exercise that involves all group members.

- I will give a general appraisal of the work done. I will highlight the strengths that were displayed. When it comes to focusing on problematic areas in the trainee's functioning I tend to comment on one area only. More is not necessarily better, and the trainee cannot learn when feeling overwhelmed.

When trainers and training institutes relate to a larger system, the effect is greater accountability and cohesion

The Christchurch Institute is part of and relates to a larger system. Under the auspices of the ANZPA Board of Examiners, a

number of training institutes have sprung up throughout Australia and New Zealand. The Board of Examiners has the task to ensure staff appointments are appropriate and affirms the need for, and supports, ongoing staff development. Most of the staff of the New Zealand training institutes meet once or twice a year in 'trainer development workshops', as well as a yearly meeting of the Federation of NZ Training Institutes. These meetings have led to the development of a greater cohesion between the training centres, and between the staff from different regions. The continuing interchange has made training efforts throughout New Zealand better co-ordinated and more unified. The yearly ANZPA conference is another venue for contact, and promotes interchange between New Zealand and Australian colleagues. Unified training efforts are further supported by the fact that all training institutes subscribe to the ANZPA Code of Ethics, and have the ANZPA Training and Standards Manual as a point of reference and inspiration.

The Christchurch Institute has also developed a functional relationship with the local ANZPA Branch, to the extent that some events are organised jointly, such as a 'psychodrama community gathering', or an 'open day' for the public. Institute staff are also involved with 'outreach activities' such as providing speakers or facilitators for the conferences or meetings of other organisations.

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