

What is 'good' sharing?

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"That wasn't very good sharing," said a group member after their own sharing at a psychodrama residential session about ten years ago. That statement stayed with me.

When attention is given to the quality of sharing all group members are assisted to enlarge their role repertoire, which will serve them in their lives as they go out into the world following the session. I have been warmed up to the question of what makes 'good' sharing and how can I contribute, as an audience member, to sharing in a 'good' way? Here's what I have come up with after reflecting on my own experiences and reading several authors on the topic.

Firstly, let's clarify the definition and purpose of sharing.

What is sharing?

Sharing follows the dramatic enactment and is the concluding phase of a psychodrama session. Typically, at the completion of the enactment phase, the director invites group members to let the group know what they warmed up to as a result of the protagonist's drama.

What is the purpose of sharing?

Delving into the writings of the psychodramatists listed in the reference section at the end of this paper, most authors agree that the purpose of the sharing phase is integration. Max Clayton states that "the purpose of the sharing phase [...] is to assist the protagonist to be connected to the members of the group" (Clayton & Carter, 2004, p. 129). Tian Dayton (2005) adds that the sharing phase "gives the group members the opportunity to understand themselves with greater awareness and depth and allows them to connect with another person (the protagonist) at that level—to share a moment of truth, [...] and create an authentic connection" (p. 18). She goes on to note that sharing "also reduces the isolation of the protagonist, reconnects [them ...] to the group, [...] and allows new connections to be made" (p. 18).

My thinking is that sharing gives group members time and space to bring themselves forward in relation to the work that has been done in the enactment thus identifying how they are similar to or different from the protagonist. Each person becomes more known to themselves and others. From Max Clayton's (2004) reflections my interpretation is that

new light can be shed on each person's social and cultural atom and warm-ups to further work emerge (see p. 129).

According to Gillie Ruscombe-King (1998) the task of the sharing is "the making of what is internal external, of what is private public and what feels alienating and paralysing into connections that are universal and liberating" (pp. 169-170). In other words, sharing enables what has been unconscious to become conscious.

Though not intentionally therapeutic, the sharing phase can illuminate something new for the protagonist as well as something new for audience members or a person who has been an auxiliary in the enactment. "Sharing is a time for group catharsis and integration" (Karp, 1998, p. 9).

"[Sharing] is a time when a mutual tele relationship can be restored and perhaps even developed further than has happened before. [...] It's a time when the social and cultural atom of the protagonist can be further refined and developed in a creative way. It's also a time when the social and cultural atom of the individual group members can be further developed and refined" (Clayton & Carter, 2004, p. 129). The sharing phase is as important as the warm-up and enactment to the effectiveness of the overall session.

What happens in sharing?

During the enactment each group member will have had a unique experience. Revealing their experiences enables group members to see each other in a differentiated way so they can keep exploring and discovering who they are in relation to each other. This can occur in a variety of ways. For example, there are verbal and non-verbal ways of sharing: "[...] just eye contact can convey a great deal and add to the healing of a session" (Bradshaw Tavon, 1998, p. 106); using space to place oneself in relation to the protagonist; identifying points of most involvement in the enactment; conveying how one is like or unlike the protagonist; letting the protagonist know what has shifted in the relationship between them and the group member or what the group member has become clearer about. "Sometimes a person sharing from his life experiences connects with an aspect of the drama that he himself has been unaware of and has not yet registered could be an element worth considering" (p. 98).

However, all sharing need not necessarily be relevant to the protagonist. For group members to feel satisfied it may be necessary for an individual to have their own enactment in a vignette to bring forth the impact on them; to bring into themselves and bring out for others—including the protagonist—how they identify with the work.

For the sharing at the end of a sociodrama, Ken Sprague (1998) alerts us to the possibilities of learnings being revealed and the ventilation of as yet unexpressed feelings and thoughts. Kellerman (2007) asks participants in a political sociodrama “to engage in responsive conversation, and to embark on a creative problem-solving journey [... with the goal] that this discussion will lead to constructive suggestions for political change that involves social action” (p. 88).

When is sharing finished?

Max Clayton (1991) states that, “The ideal situation is the closing of the session when the protagonist and all the members of the group are warmed up to a role or set of roles that will be adequate for the life situations they will be entering. The members of the group naturally warm up to roles that are functional when the theme of the drama is relevant to them, when that theme is explored in depth, and when the drama arrives at an adequate climax and conclusion” (p. 62).

As an audience member what do I consider when sharing?

There are some ‘givens’ to consider for sharing based on awareness of the vulnerability and “somewhat emotionally naked position” (Bradshaw Tavon, 1998, p. 106) of the protagonist. For example, not exposing the protagonist to analysis, feedback or judgment and not giving advice.

Sharing as an audience member requires me to be present to my own experience in response to the enactment and to give voice to this or to put it into action as clearly as I can, while showing respect for the protagonist, myself, other members of the group, and the director.

I aim to balance thought, feeling and action. Tom Wilson (1984) says the “process of sharing has nothing to do with everybody being nice to each other. Each person needs to own their own feelings, attitudes and ideas”. I take this to mean I can express myself strongly and directly while being thoughtful and alert to my own theme interference when old functioning gets in the way.

Sometimes I have had experiences in an auxiliary role that were not expressed fully during the enactment. During sharing I have an opportunity to express these as a group member. This assists me to differentiate from the auxiliary role and it might add something for the protagonist.

I notice the sociometry considering the possibilities for creating or growing mutuality.

Realising that I am in a group that has just created something unique, I aim to grow or reveal the sociometric connections by identifying (or not) with the protagonist and other group members. I consider my physical

location and my connections in the group and how these influence me. Being closer to the protagonist could enhance the meaning and impact of my sharing. Alternatively, as sometimes occurs for me, by being more distant from the protagonist allows me to hold them fully in my gaze and regard, while being fully present and in relationship.

What are the director's responsibilities?

The director is responsible for the overall conduct and conclusion of the sharing phase. Some considerations are primarily the concern of the director, for example they watch the group process encouraging audience members to reveal themselves; they determine whether or not everyone needs to share or whether they as the director will share; they provide form and structure for the sharing to occur efficiently and effectively and intervene when necessary to ensure the session reaches a satisfactory conclusion. For example, they manage the time ensuring the session finishes at the specified time. An audience member can also have awareness of time although this can lead to a tension and lowering of their warm-up. Max Clayton directed sharing to be crisp. This can still be full of life using voice tone, pace and action to relate to the protagonist and the group.

Sometimes the director may intervene to focus, deepen or bring sharing to a conclusion. For example, if a group member goes on for a long time, in a circuitous, rambling fashion it may indicate a change in warm-up or it might reflect the role-functioning of the audience member and that they need assistance. On occasion this may include an enactment of a vignette to bring forth the impact of the drama, finish the piece of work or lead to a catharsis of integration that might occur then or later for the audience member.

What have I put into practice?

Reviewing the different ways that practitioners have articulated the purpose and conduct of the sharing or integration phase has given a piquancy to my warm up and what I attend to when I am an audience member, whether as a group member at an open night session or at a conference workshop session, in community forums or social settings when one person has brought themselves forward and needs to be reconnected within the group.

I have been spurred on by Max Clayton encouraging group members "to become more reflective, more aware of themselves, more explorative, more adventurous, freed from stereotypical, habitual patterns of living." (Clayton & Carter, 2004, p. 129-130). I feel uplifted by Tian Dayton's

(2005) comment that learning to describe my inner world in words also builds my emotional literacy.

I have experimented with applying what I know to be 'good' sharing in my personal life. Here are a couple of examples. Linking members of a community group with a guest presenter and with each other, and sharing memories and reflections at a celebration or memorial about a person or a change of circumstances for a special group or place.

In my local women's group, we often have guest presenters—an author, a solicitor, an NGO leader. We also have members of our group present their own stories—their social and cultural background, work, family, key events, interests. Rather than expect the presenter to manage the questions and comments from the audience, I sometimes step in as group leader applying principles I have gleaned in relation to sharing. With the intention of reducing the speaker's isolation, I link audience members' experiences to that of the speaker. Sometimes the speaker gains new awareness of her own life and responds with something like, "I hadn't thought of it like that before". I feel satisfied when this occurs.

Another example occurred at a gathering for family and friends to honour my father's life. Since the funeral had been private, it was the first occasion people had to come together. Some folk knew each other, though not the qualities of each other's relationship with my father. Considering the gathering in terms of warm up, action and integration phases, we allowed time for the presentation of my father's life-story and brief family reflections using a roving microphone. The form and structure were very effective allowing colleagues, new and long-term friends, hobby companions, and members of community service organisations, to all share moments of connection with my father. I could feel the warm-up growing as each person chose their time to speak and chose their special memory to reveal, with each personal snippet prompting someone else's. By the end of the gathering, I had a sense that connections had been made and that much of the act hunger to honour and farewell my father had been met.

As Tom Wilson says (1984) "when there has been adequate sharing time in the group, the whole group is fed. This principle applies not just in psychodrama groups."

Implications for developing 'good' sharing practices

As I reflect on my experiences of sharing, I recall what various directors, including myself, have done to produce the sharing phase. Sometimes they say something like this to the protagonist: "You just sit back, you've done the work. You don't need to do anything. Just be." I have given this

statement much thought recently wondering about how it assists integration to occur. This is what has emerged.

As a protagonist, this directive gives me the space to stay present, to take in as much as I want, to trust that my director will continue working with the other group members and will intervene if assessment, analysis or questions arise. As a protagonist, sharing is my opportunity to notice others making links between their lives and mine in recognition of our common humanity, and re-establishing relationships within the group. "The discovery that group members may have been riveted to the action, watching their own lives flash across their minds, can be very healthy for the protagonist" (Dayton, 2005, p. 25). I like this much more than imagining that the group has been bored or that I am being asked to say something extra.

If sharing is to avoid becoming habitual or predictable, audience members might find new expressions and responses to sharing, and directors new ways to introduce the sharing process, that are explorative, adventurous and experimental.

Conclusion

A comment stimulating me to consider the characteristics of 'good' sharing and what this means for our collective practice has led to me to review what various authors have written and to reflect on my own views on the subject. Some of my psychodrama trainers used the expression 'canon of creativity' to refer to Moreno's (1953) challenge to rise up with spontaneity as a way to change cultural conserves. On that foundation I have written this article boldly with heart and head to assist my and everyone's part in the production of 'good' sharing.

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Penny Beran is an Affiliated Associate who joined the psychodrama community in 2002 via the Sydney AANZPA Conference and subsequent training program. She stays connected as an active member of the regional branch committee, attending open nights and AANZPA conferences. She aims to bring a psychodramatic and sociometric awareness to her involvements with local community groups and sustaining and growing relationships with family and friends.

