

Reflection on 60 Years as A Psychodramatist in America

John Nolte

National Psychodrama Training Center

ABSTRACT

This paper is a personal document in which the author shares his personal experiences in learning, understanding, and practicing the psychodrama method in a variety of settings over a long career of 60 years. He begins by challenging the definition of psychodrama as a method of psychotherapy, pointing out its many non-psychotherapy applications and suggesting that it is generically a method of creating dramas, useful in many ways.

The author discusses problems and difficulties in learning and becoming proficient with the psychodrama method, the ways in which psychodramatic psychotherapy differs radically from more common psychotherapeutic methods, the existential and phenomenological characteristics of J. L. Moreno's work, and the importance of the concept of surplus reality.

Finally he discusses the many ways in which psychodrama has been applied in non-clinical fields such as education and business and industry. He also relates in considerable more detail his experiences in introducing psychodrama to trial lawyers and how they discovered multiple ways of using psychodrama in the practice of their profession.

**Keywords: psychodrama, J. L. Moreno, existential, phenomenological, surplus
reality**

Psychodrama has been an integral part of my professional and personal life now for nearly 60 years. I have applied the psychodramatic method in many different settings in the years since I first started training: in mental health hospitals and clinics, business organizations, medical education, university education, in the training of lawyers, and in trial consultation. I have long been an enthusiastic advocate of non-clinical uses of the psychodramatic method even though, like the majority of certified psychodramatists, my most extensive experience has been psychodramatic psychotherapy. As I think about writing this paper, I ask myself what have I learned from these years of experience with psychodrama that will be helpful to students who are striving to master the psychodramatic method and those who are less far along than I am in their psychodramatic careers.

I was introduced to psychodrama in 1959 during a two day introductory psychodrama workshop conducted at the state psychiatric hospital where I was a staff psychologist. My eyes were opened and I immediately recognized the potency of psychodrama compared with the psychotherapeutic methods that I had been taught. I promised myself that I would learn how to use psychodrama. My resolution was only strengthened after I spent two weeks training at the Moreno Institute with Dr. J. L. and Zerka Moreno. I returned to the Institute many times over the next years and, after Moreno died, Zerka asked me to become the Director of Training, a position that I held for a year and a half.

A Method for Creating Dramas

It took me some years to recognize that the inherent purpose of psychodrama is to create dramas. I thought that the fundamental objective was to conduct psychotherapy, perhaps because psychodrama was almost always defined as a method of psychotherapy, or because I intended to use psychodrama in order to become a better and more effective psychotherapist. I eventually realized that the true definition of psychodrama is: *psychodrama is a method of spontaneously creating dramas; it can be employed in carrying out any one of several goals.*

One might ask if it makes a difference whether psychodrama is a method of creating a drama or a method of psychotherapy. I believe that the future of psychodrama depends upon the recognition of that distinction. Even though psychodrama has been most widely employed as a method of psychotherapy, psychotherapy is only one of many functions for which the method is powerfully appropriate. In addition to psychotherapy, psychodrama is a potent technology for training leadership skills and other roles, and for increasing spontaneity. Another function of psychodrama is in organization development, the improvement of how business and industrial organizations, educational institutions, and governmental agencies function. Psychodrama has also been applied as a research instrument in the social sciences and in phenomenological research. Psychodrama has found a place in classroom education as well, most often under the name of role playing.

“Know thyself” is an Ancient Greek aphorism inscribed in the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. During the 1950s and for two or more decades, the Human Potential Movement in America offered scores of programs designed to help people better know themselves. Combining elements of psychotherapy and of small group research, the approach was called personal growth and often described as “psychotherapy for people who don’t need psychotherapy.” Psychodrama was one of the early methods, perhaps the first, method of personal growth and development. Every application of psychodrama incorporates some degree of personal growth and development. Most psychodrama training programs are conducted as personal growth and development workshops.

I am opposed defining psychodrama as psychotherapy because it has so many other contributions to make to society. Only a small minority of people actually need psychotherapy; everybody can use psychodrama in one way or another. Defining psychodrama as psychotherapy means that only individuals trained as psychotherapists can direct psychodrama. I think this is one reason why its many non-clinical applications have been neglected. Many non-therapists have become mastered the psychodrama method and are excellent directors. I have had occasion to apply the psychodramatic method in a number of non-psychotherapy activities and those experiences have convinced me that there is a tremendous potential for employing the psychodramatic

method in a multitude of settings where it is little known. I will discuss my experiences with psychodrama and trial lawyers at length later in this article.

Psychodrama for Psychotherapy

Psychodrama applications for purposes other than psychotherapy were common soon after Moreno began psychodrama training in the early 1940s. One can find numerous articles in the early issues of the journal, *Sociometry*, on psychodrama in education and in business and industry. None the less, psychotherapists have made up the majority of psychodramatists. I am one of them and this article is written with psychodramatic psychotherapists primarily in mind.

A majority of those who become psychodramatists have already been trained as psychotherapists or counselors. This fact leads to the first problem that a novice director of psychodrama confronts, the radical difference between conventional psychotherapeutic methods and psychodrama. Moreno (1950) wrote an article in which he compared the similarities and differences between individual psychotherapy, psychodrama, and group psychotherapy. Major differences between psychodrama and group psychotherapy began with the “vehicle” or mechanism of the method. For psychotherapy, it is the couch (for psychoanalysis) or chair (for interview psychotherapy), both of which immobilize the client, versus the multi-dimensional stage upon which the client is able to act, enact, and interact. This leads to the next difference: in individual psychotherapy the client describes experiences in words; in psychodrama he or she shows experiences in action. A description of what one experiences is at best an abstract of that experience. Reenactment involves not just one’s memory or cognition but all of one’s self. Individual psychotherapy requires an understanding of psychodynamics, psychodrama an understanding of action dynamics. Individual psychotherapy is intrapersonal and the difficulties of the client imply psychopathology, a mental malfunction of some kind; psychodrama is interpersonal and the client’s difficulties are perceived as resulting from problematic interactions with significant other people in one’s life. In individual psychotherapy, the psychotherapist interprets the client behavior; in psychodrama the

director provides the situation in which the client/protagonist can interpret him or herself.

One of the first tasks that an individual psychotherapist faces is making a diagnosis. The diagnosis may determine what method of psychotherapy or what techniques are appropriate to employ in treatment. I realized early in my training that diagnosis is not that important for psychodrama. The psychodramatist works directly with the real life problems as the client presents them, without regard for the diagnosis. The client-as-protagonist shows us how he or she acted in a problem situation, reversing roles to show us how significant other people in his or her life responded, soliloquizing to make internal thoughts and feelings apparent, and using all the other psychodramatic techniques to dramatize his or her subjective self. The situation becomes clear to protagonist, director, and group. Integrative catharsis and action insight which occur during the psychodrama make many problems of the past evaporate, or give the protagonist suggestion for solving on-going difficult situations. Even with psychotic people, J. L. Moreno did not wait to diagnose a disorder before he began psychodrama. When a man showed up in his office claiming to be Adolf Hitler, Moreno did not conduct a typical psychiatric examination. Rather, he said, "Come with me. The people are waiting to hear from you," and took the man to the theater where a group of students were waiting for a session with Moreno (1957). From the balcony of the theater, "Hitler" gave a stirring speech, his first experience as a protagonist in a psychodrama.

My first training experience at the Moreno Institute coincided with the admission of a woman who stated that she had been divorced from her husband and remarried to another man. The divorce and remarriage had been conducted through "radio waves." She complained that the old husband would not let her leave to look for the new husband, a man whom she hadn't see for seven years. After hearing her out, Dr. Moreno did not point out the impossibility of being divorced and remarried by radio waves. Instead, he promised, "I'll help you in the best way I know."

Instead of seeing the problems that clients brought to him as the result of internal psychopathology, Moreno saw them as interpersonal difficulties. He wrote an article entitled *Inter-Personal Therapy and the Psychopathology of Inter-Personal Relations* (1937) in which he described his treatment of three people entangled in a triangle of

relationships. They were a wife, her husband, and the husband's lover. All three exhibited psychiatric symptoms and suffered emotional pain. The husband had fallen out of love with his wife and in love with another woman. The wife wanted the husband to stay with her and regain his earlier feelings of affection toward her. She threatened suicide if he left. The husband was anxious and depressed, afraid to leave but yearning to be with his new love. He had made a suicide attempt. The husband's new love was depressed and had developed agoraphobia. Moreno worked with helping the three understand each other until the wife accepted that the impossibility of restoring the relationship with her husband. They divorced and the husband married the other woman. The symptoms of all three people abated.

An Existential, Phenomenological Method

J. L. Moreno (1956) stated clearly that psychodrama is an existential, phenomenological method. This distinguishes psychodrama from conventional psychotherapies which are based on a different philosophy, the objectivist, positivist philosophy underlying medicine and scientific psychology. Psychologists regard the individual as an organism in an environment to which it responds. The psychodramatist, on the other hand, considers an individual, a human being who acts and interacts, in a situation. The person brings into the situation the residual effects of his life experiences, the consequences of which influence perceptions, understandings, and tendencies to act. The situation is not only the physical and social environments but challenges to act and problems to solve. Life consists of one situation which, when the challenges are met, leads to the next situation.

"There is," Moreno wrote, "a pathological aspect to all life-situations as they exist in our culture today—regardless of the mental conditions, normal or abnormal, of their constituents. Very few relationships are continuous and permanent, and even these few are often prematurely ended by the death of one of the partners" (1940, p, 229). All important life experiences are slow to reach actualization. Love relationships require time to develop. Life seems full of tensions, disillusionments and dissatisfactions. Relationships for the most part tend to be incomplete and end in a unsatisfactory fashion. A life-situation

may be problematic because the two people who compose it spend too much time together; in another case because they spend too little time together.

Excepting rare instances, therefore, but few undertakings of any of us ever get so much as started. Every one of us has ideas—'dreams'—of himself in a variety of situations. These we call "roles". Most of our roles remain in the "dream" stage—they are never attempted or begun, and any attempts at actualizing our roles (rare as they are) remain, like most of our relationships, fragmentary, inconclusive, loose ends. The number of major and minor disequilibria rising from instances such as these is so large that even someone with superhuman moral resources might well be confused and at a loss (p. 229-230).

Rather than treating psychopathology, Moreno conceived of psychodrama as restoring emotional equilibrium.

The moment is an important existential concept. It is the here-and-now, the present in which life takes place. With respect to psychodrama, it is important to always keep in mind that the psychodrama takes place in the moment. A psychodramatic reenactment of an event which took place long ago in the protagonist's life is the reenactment of the protagonist's here-and-now memory of that event. It is not an historical reenactment. We know that memory is subject to alteration, even in a brief time period. This does not matter because what happened to you in the past is not what influences your perception of events in the present; it is the way you remember what happened and what it means to you right now. This is why an experienced director keeps a psychodrama in the present. The psychodrama is taking place in the present. It is an original and unique event even when it incorporates the protagonist's memories of past events.

Learning to Direct

In the training workshops of the National Psychodrama Training Center, I encourage beginning directors to first focus on the role of dramatist and on developing the skills that go with that role. There are several reasons for this emphasis on the drama aspect of psychodrama. Turning the thoughts and feelings of another person into a drama is a set of skills that most psychotherapists do not have and psychodrama is precisely that process.

Also, it happens that simply reenacting successfully and completely the personal experiences of the protagonist provides the action catharsis that restores emotional equilibrium. The method takes care of the therapy. Then there is the fact that most trainees already have a psychotherapist role.

Psychodrama is actually a complex method to learn. The techniques are deceptively easy to grasp, as easy as children's play, we might say. After all, children's creative play was the model for psychodrama. Although the techniques are easy to learn, using them creatively to produce aesthetic and meaningful dramas in which protagonists become the heroes of their own lives is another matter. To master the psychodramatic method requires a certain level of maturity and self understanding, a long period of training over several years, and a lot of practice and experience with psychodrama, both as a protagonist and as a director in training.

The importance of being a protagonist during training cannot be over emphasized. When students in training with me to be psychodrama directors ask me what the best way to learn the skills of directing is, I tell them, "Be a protagonist as often as you can." We learn about being parents by being children. We learn about being teachers by being students. We learn about directing psychodrama by being directed in our own psychodramas. And, of course, there is no better way of achieving understanding of ourselves and our emotions than psychodrama. Self understanding is an essential quality of a competent psychodrama director.

Everyone has more experiences to psychodramatize than they know. J. L. Moreno thought that we should dramatize every meaningful experience, both positive and negative, that we have ever undergone. I am in whole hearted agreement. Meaningful experiences are both positive and negative. They are those events that we remember for a long, long time even if we don't consciously think about them very often. They are events which, when we recall them, bring up the emotions associated with the original happening. Every memory accompanied by intense feelings has something to teach us when we reenact it. In so many psychodrama sessions, we dramatize negative life experiences from the past. Actually, there is a lot to learn from reenacting positive experiences as well, and psychodramas of meaningful experiences are usually very

moving dramas.

There are three ways in which psychodrama trainees profit by being the protagonist of their own psychodramas. The first benefit is catharsis, the resolution of the old emotional wounds that threw us out of balance and an increase in spontaneity. The second value comes from experiencing the method as protagonist. While we can learn about directing from watching other direct, there is no better way to learn the effects of psychodramatic techniques than from the role of the protagonist. The third reward comes from exploring the full range of our emotions, something that is difficult for most people to do in life reality itself. One can only help others master their fiercest angers, greatest fears, and deepest pain after one has mastered one's own fiercest angers, greatest fears and deepest pain. Moreno has said that the most important personal trait for a psychodrama director to have is courage. It requires courage to take protagonists to the deepest, darkest experiences of their lives.

I am inclined to think that any event in our lives that we recall with strong emotion is one that has meaning for us that we have not fully assimilated. It is an event from which we have something to learn, an event to re-experience in psychodrama. The lessons we learn from these events are often non-verbal, the kind that we feel, that give us information about ourselves, about others in our lives, and about the world we live in.

Becoming thoroughly skilled as a psychodrama director takes a long time compared to other methods. The Moreno Institute required a minimum of 16 weeks of training in residence at the Institute, spread out over a minimum of four years. The expectation was that one would undergo a week or two of training and then practice what one had learned, return for more training and then practice. Zerka Moreno has written that it took her seven years to master the psychodrama method. I believe that it took me at least ten years to reach a point at which I felt competent enough to direct any person or any issue that a protagonist brought to the psychodrama stage. I returned to the Moreno Institute many times after I had completed the requirements for certification.

The First Scene

The first problem that the psychodrama director has is how to get a psychodrama

started. I remember how difficult that seemed to be when I started training as a psychodramatist, and I see students in training workshops today struggle as well. I recall conducting long initial interviews. I felt that I needed to know all about the protagonist's problem in order to know how to begin the drama. When I look back, I realize now what I didn't see then. As a psychotherapist I had been taught get information by interviewing the client. I had transferred that skill to the role of the director. Now I keep the initial interview as short as possible and get the information in action.

Moreno instructed us: "Don't let them *tell* the story" (Moreno, 1954, p. 139). "Don't tell me. Show me" was a maxim of the Moreno Institute. Moreno urged directors to get the protagonist into action as soon as possible. Moreno gave a reason for proceeding in this manner. Telling the story first has the effect of reducing spontaneity. It is similar to rehearsing and a repeated drama soon loses its novelty and freshness. The art of acting in conventional theater is making the fiftieth performance look as new and fresh as the first, but in psychodrama we are not actors masquerading in roles in which we do not live. We act ourselves in our own roles and in scenes and events that have or might occur in life reality.

If one can put aside the psychotherapist role for the moment and become a dramatist, it is seldom difficult to get the action started quickly. To do so, the director keeps in mind that the initial task is to tell a story, an event from the protagonist's life, in dramatic form. One is first a dramatist, then a therapist. Here are two made up examples showing how I once might have begun a psychodrama and how I might do it today. This is the way I might have done early on:

Director (D): What would you like to work on in this psychodrama?

Protagonist (P): It is a problem with my wife. We have frequent quarrels.

D: What do you quarrel about?

P: She accuses me of not caring enough about her?

D: How long have you been married?

P: Seven years.

D: How do these quarrels begin?

P: Maybe I decide to stop by the bar and have a drink with people I work with.

D: Do you do that often?

P: No. Just once in a while someone says, "Let's go get a beer after work," and I go along.

And this is how I might start the drama today:

D: What are we going to explore in this drama?

P: It is a problem with my wife. We have frequent quarrels.

D: Why don't you show us the last quarrel you had with her. Where are we?

P: In the kitchen of our house.

D: Let's set the scene. Stand in the doorway. Now describe what we see.

And the protagonist is into action. With the director's help, he sets the scene, selects an auxiliary to take the role of his wife, reverses roles to present the wife, and the drama is well underway. Following Moreno's directive, I usually try to keep the initial interview to a minimum and get the protagonist into psychodramatic action within the first two minutes. The drama unfolds from the first scene.

Walk and Talk

I have been troubled to see a growing number of psychodrama trainers and practitioners today who are violating Moreno's "Don't let them tell the story" injunction. These are the psychodramatists who practice "Walk and Talk," a long and detailed initial interview routinely carried out prior to getting the protagonist into psychodramatic action. Walk and Talk has been described by Garcia (n.d.). According to Garcia, the director and protagonist walk around the stage. Sometimes, with the protagonist's permission, they hold hands. They discuss various aspects of the issue or story to discover the focus of the drama. Directors question the protagonist to get the information they need to know in order to direct the drama. They decide who the characters in the drama will be, where the first scene will take place, and perhaps what scenes and how many will be in the drama. Walk and Talk is also a time to establish a contract, the director asking such questions of the protagonist as "What do you want to happen in the drama?," "How will you know if the drama is a success?," "What do you want to be sure to do?," and "What do you want to come away from the drama with?" "By the end of the walk and talk, the director and

protagonist know the following: where the action will take place; what characters will be in the drama; and what the contract is. The director may also have a working hypothesis of what issues the protagonist is dealing with and how he may help him in the drama,” Garcia (n.d.) writes.

Walk and Talk essentially plans the psychodrama and tells the story in advance of the drama. It dampens the spontaneity of both protagonist and director and serves to confine and limit the drama to the scenes and issues discussed. I refuse to allow students in training workshops to engage in Walk and Talk and firmly advise students against it. I agree with Zerka Moreno who liked to say, “it doesn’t matter *where* you begin, only *that* you begin.” Once the protagonist goes into action, with competent assistance from the director, the drama will unfold.

Following the Protagonist’s Warm Up

Competence in directing is comprised of several elements, one of the most important of which is the ability to recognize and keep close track of the protagonist’s emotional state, the protagonist’s warming up process. The protagonist’s predominant emotion at any moment is the key to the action that the protagonist needs to take. Often, the protagonist cannot identify what he or she is feeling. Then it becomes the director’s responsibility to help the protagonist recognize the feeling he or she is experiencing.

I recently watched a YouTube interview of a person who studied psychodrama and then developed a hybrid method by adding her own theory of doors through which an individual must go to achieve emotional well-being. She developed her method, she said, because her protagonists kept getting stuck in psychodrama. Protagonists don’t often get stuck in psychodrama; it is directors who get stuck, directors who find themselves beyond their level of competence. It is bound to happen while one is learning. In the training workshop the supervisor can often help the novice director find a path. If a director finds him or herself often getting stuck (or finds that their protagonists are often getting stuck), he or she should seek further training.

I find it helpful to remind myself that *the source of therapy in the group is not the group therapist, but that each person is the therapist of every other person.* Moreno

(1947) taught this basic principle of group psychotherapy, which he discovered working with groups of prostitutes in Vienna in 1913 (1953a, 1989), over and over again. Few schools of group psychotherapy other than psychodrama recognize this truth. The responsibility of the group therapist, Moreno said, is to *create the conditions* in which group members can be therapists of each other. Psychodrama offers the best opportunity in which that can happen.

Surplus Reality

A major source of the magic of psychodrama comes from the surplus reality of the psychodrama stage. I believe that when a psychodramatist has fully grasped the meaning of surplus reality, directing becomes much easier. Moreno wrote:

The living space of reality is often narrow and restraining; [one] may easily lose his equilibrium. On the stage he may find it again, due to its methodology of freedom – freedom from unbearable stress and freedom for experience and expression. The stage space is an extension of life beyond the reality test of life itself. Reality and fantasy are not in conflict, but both are functions within a wider sphere – the psychodramatic world of objects, persons and events. (J. L. Moreno, 1953b, p 82).

He also wrote: “It can well be said that the psychodrama provides the subject with a new and more extensive experience of reality, a ‘*surplus reality*’” (J. L. Moreno, 1953b, p. 85). The surplus reality of psychodrama allows us to re-experience old incidents in our lives in order to extract new information from them, information that we may have missed the first time around, information that may free us from the burdens of the past. Surplus reality allows us to slow down life when it goes too fast or to speed life up when it goes too slow. It is surplus reality that permits us to anticipate and rehearse for the future. It is surplus reality that enables us to externalize, encounter, and interact with our subjective thoughts and images. All manner of experiences which everyday reality will not permit are possible of realization in surplus reality of psychodramatic techniques. “Hence, psychodrama brings the entire cosmos into play” (J. L. Moreno, 1965, p. 213).

Many of today's psychodramatists have been taught that surplus reality refers to psychodramatic scenes that go beyond the straightforward reenactment of past experiences. An example is the reparative scene in which a protagonist creates the drama of what should have happened instead of what actually did happen. Although those scenes certainly are surplus reality, the fact is that *all of psychodrama* is surplus reality. In everyday life we cannot re-experience events that have disturbed our equilibrium. We cannot become our spouse through role reversal. We cannot stand outside ourselves and see ourselves as we can in psychodrama. We do not have doubles who help us articulate feelings that we are not identifying in the moment. We cannot take ourselves to a location or event from our past, or visit heaven or hell or any place on earth. We cannot have an encounter with a deceased parent or child. All psychodramatic techniques invoke an element of surplus reality. Empty chairs represent individuals. Males can take the roles of females and vice versa. It is through surplus reality that the protagonist can achieve new, re-organized perceptions of self, significant others, relationships, and status in the world (Z. T. Moreno, Blomkvist, & Reutzell, 2000).

It is helpful in understanding surplus reality to recall the make believe games we played as children. Whether we were exploring new and uninhabited lands or jungles full of dangerous creatures or simply playing school with the teacher scolding a recalcitrant student, there were moments when the imaginary scene became quite real. It happened when we were thoroughly involved in our activities and totally unaware of time until we heard a parent call us into the house for dinner. This is the surplus reality that J. L. Moreno taught us to use as adults to recapture the creativity that came naturally to us as children.

Non-clinical Psychodrama

Moreno discovered how to use spontaneity drama techniques for psychotherapeutic purposes during the time of the *Stegreiftheater*, the early 1920s while he was still in Vienna. None the less, he first employed role playing methods at the New York State Training School for Girls for purposes other than psychotherapy, for spontaneity training

and role training. His detailed report of his work at the Training School did not contain the word psychodrama (Moreno, 1934). Only after he had established Beacon Hill Sanitarium in Beacon, N.Y., did Moreno truly adapted spontaneity drama techniques for psychotherapy. He used the term, psychodrama, for the first time in an article published in *Sociometry* in 1937.

It was not long after the opening of the Sociometric Institute and Psychodrama Theater in New York in 1942, where Moreno began offering courses and training in both sociometry and psychodrama, that articles began appearing in the professional literature on role playing and role training in business and industry. Books, such as Norman Maier's (1952) *Human Relations: Application to Management*, with several chapters on role training in industrial settings appeared. By 1954, when researcher Gustav Stahl published a survey of training directors in industrial corporations on the use of role playing techniques, he received replies from 107 "industrial, commercial, collegiate, and government organizations" (p. 203) who reported using role playing as a training modality. The training directors used role playing in the training of higher plant management, line supervisors, other supervisors, and technicians. Role playing is widely employed in business and industry today but its connection with psychodrama has largely been lost. In my opinion, this is unfortunate as training directors could greatly improve their utilization of role training if they were cognizant of psychodrama techniques such as role reversal, soliloquy, and mirroring.

Reports of psychodrama in the field of education appeared as early as 1939 (Franz), and articles on role playing in the school classroom by Lillian Kay (1947) and Von Wiese (1952) came a few years later. Kay used what Moreno would have called role testing and role training in college and nursing courses. Since that time scores of articles have been published in education journals describing the employment of role playing, psychodrama, and sociodrama in the classroom. Dozens of articles in educational literature describe how teachers have employed role playing techniques in classrooms, from elementary grades to college level classes. Teachers have been extremely creative in finding ways of teaching subjects such as: acting, aesthetics, accounting, environment, mitosis, environment, evolution, endocrine regulation, ethics, ethology, economics, history,

language, law, literature, nursing, philosophy, politics, public speaking, resource management, and sociology with action methods. The authors of these papers tend to be quite enthusiastic and see role playing as a very powerful teaching method. Action learning methods engage the whole person of the student, not just cognitive and memory functions.

As with role training in industry, the use of role playing in education was recognized as an application of psychodrama for a few decades. Teachers who devise action methods for their classrooms do so with little or no training. There is enough evidence to suggest that role playing is a superior approach to teaching many subjects. It seems to me that the time is ripe for an organized exploration of role playing in the classroom to ascertain its value to the field of formal education. This is a fertile field for psychodramatists to explore. Psychodrama could contribute greatly in research, training and assisting teachers to use this powerful method.

Psychodrama and Trial Lawyers

One of the most gratifying ventures of my career as a psychodramatist involved introducing trial lawyers to psychodrama. In 1978, John Ackerman dean of the National College for Criminal Defense, a post-graduate educational program for lawyers, sought a way to teach lawyers how to be intuitive and creative in the courtroom. He talked to a friend who was a mental health professional who suggested that psychodrama might be what Ackerman was seeking. The college engaged psychodramatist, Don Clarkson, and presented a pilot program. It was a great hit and the National College of Criminal Defense produced a number of similar programs until 1985 when Ackerman left the deanship. Ackerman's friend and colleague, renowned lawyer, Gerry Spence, had attended the pilot program.

In 1994, Spence founded his own lawyer training program, the Trial Lawyers College, on his ranch in Wyoming. His goal was to pass along to younger lawyers the trial skills that had made him so successful. His program was only for civil plaintiff and criminal defense lawyers, those who advocate for individuals who have either suffered

harm because of someone's actions, or who have been accused of committing a crime. Prosecutors and lawyers who worked for corporations or the government were not accepted at his College. One of Spence's basic tenets was that knowing oneself and understanding one's emotions in the heat of a courtroom trial was essential to being an effective trial lawyer. Spence had been impressed by power of psychodrama as a way of achieving this knowledge. He decided to start his month long lawyer training program with three days of psychodramatic personal growth and development and to conclude it with another two days of psychodrama. He engaged Don Clarkson and myself to conduct this part of the program.

I went to the Trial Lawyers College knowing very little about it except that that there would be 48 students and 10 to 12 teaching staff, and that I would be conducting personal growth and development psychodrama for three days. I had some concerns about how psychodrama and I would be received by lawyers. I thought that they might resent coming to an educational program for lawyers and then find themselves in a personal growth and development workshop. I imagined that they could easily reject both psychodrama and me. I prepared a psychodramatic exercise which I thought could ease both the lawyers and myself into the session. The exercise developed into a personal psychodrama and we had, from my point of view, a very good session.

Contrary to my anxieties, lawyers were quite enthusiastic about psychodrama. They were far more willing to take the protagonist role and eager to do auxiliary ego roles. They wondered why they had never heard of psychodrama in connecting with psychotherapy before. They speculated that psychodrama had been suppressed because to was so effective.

After three days of psychodrama, Clarkson and I left the College. When we returned almost four weeks later, I anticipated that I would be almost like a stranger, a dim memory from the past. To my surprise, I was heartily welcomed back and greeted with the message: "This has been a great month and it was all due to psychodrama!" I was puzzled, how a mere three days of psychodrama could have such an effect. I realized later that the psychodrama had reduced competition among the student lawyers and encouraged cooperativeness. They saw each other as human beings rather than lawyers.

It was no longer important to be better than someone else; one only had to become better oneself.

In the meantime, I learned from Spence what he hoped to achieve from the Trial Lawyers College. In his long and successful career, Spence had formulated original and effective ways of conducting the various phases of a trial. He wanted to pass his ideas along to younger lawyers to boost their competence in trial advocacy. When I realized that the College involved teaching skills, it occurred to me that psychodramatic role training might be an effective way of accomplishing his objectives.

Spence also held the opinion that a trial was about more than simply presenting the facts involved in the event that was the grounds for the lawsuit. "The lawyer is a story teller. He or she must tell his or her client's story," he proclaimed. The lawyer who told the client's story most effectively to the jury wins the verdict, he declared. His position convinced me that there might be even more of a match between the Trial Lawyers College and psychodrama because I had been emphasizing the importance of telling the protagonist's story in psychodrama training workshops. I informed Spence that I thought psychodrama might have more to offer the College than just personal growth and development. He invited me to stay and show him. I was unprepared to do so at the time but agreed to return the next year, prepared to stay.

The next year was largely a time of learning for me as I observed what was being taught at the Trial Lawyers College, and how it was being taught. There are five phases to a trial: voir dir or jury selection; opening statement; direct examination of witnesses; cross-examination of adverse witnesses; and closing statement. Each of them calls for a special set of skills. The College generally followed a training method common to post-graduate lawyer educational programs. Students were divided into six small groups of eight people, each with one or two instructors. In the small groups, each individual was given an opportunity to demonstrate the specific skill under consideration. After presenting ten minutes of an opening statement, the group and instructor critiqued the performance, stating what they liked and what they thought the student could improve. I was convinced that role training would be more effective.

Prior to the next year of the College, I conducted a workshop on role training for the

instructors and they begin to introduce role training during the third year of the College. The instructors were enthusiastic about the new approach to teaching. They became quite creative in their use of psychodramatic methods in their small groups. For example, a student in one group was having trouble in describing how his client had been hurt in an accident. The instructors directed him in setting the scene of the accident. After doing so, his presentation became much clearer and greatly improved. When the instructors reported on their experience at the daily faculty meeting, others began adding reenactments to their groups in increasingly novel ways. Eventually full reenactment of their clients' experiences became commonplace and made the advocates more forceful and effective in their presentations. The role training procedure led to a more discerning analysis of the various trial skills. This, in turn, resulted in more effective exercises for teaching the skills.

The next step occurred when a lawyer from the 1994 class asked me to work with several of his clients whom he thought could benefit emotionally from psychodrama. We found that working with clients psychodramatically was not only a positive emotional experience for them, but also that the process unearthed details about the events at the center of the lawsuit which were important for the lawyer to know and which had not emerged from interview alone. In short, psychodrama was a more powerful and effective way than interview of learning the client's story. Another discovery was that reenacting events constituted an excellent procedure for preparing clients and witnesses to testify at trial. A new role for psychodramatists as trial consultants was thus invented.

Psychodrama techniques became increasingly applied in the College. After the potential of discovering the story through psychodrama became apparent, the inevitable question was asked: Can lawyers use psychodrama with their clients? It was a serious question, of course, because psychodrama has become synonymous with psychotherapy and one needs legal sanction to conduct psychotherapy. As the psychodramatic authority for the College, I was expected to answer the question. I was sure that J. L. Moreno's answer would have been "Yes." However, he was not available to ask. I reasoned that if a lawyer was permitted to ask a prospective client, "Tell me what happened," that lawyer was also permitted to say, "Show me what happened."

It seemed reasonable, then, that lawyers could ask clients or witnesses to reenact events germane to the lawsuit. There was a problem, however. Lawyers clients have frequently experienced highly traumatic events. One of the few ways in which psychodrama can be damaging rather than beneficial is by re-traumatizing a protagonist through an incompetently directed reenactment of an intensely traumatic experience. Lawyers who wished to use psychodramatic reenactment were alerted to this possibility and advised to engage an experienced psychodramatist to direct this kind of event. They were also advised to attend training workshops if they wished to use psychodrama or psychodramatic techniques with clients.

At the time I write, over 1700 lawyers have attended the basic program of the Trial Lawyers College in Wyoming. They have formed local groups which meet regularly to work with one or another of their members to help that individual prepare a case for trial. Psychodramatic reenactment is a common procedure in these events.

Even before the issue of their using psychodrama with clients had been addressed, lawyers who had encountered psychodrama for the first time at the Trial Lawyers College started attending psychodrama training workshops. They were welcomed, of course, in the workshops that I and colleagues conducted through the Midwest Psychodrama Training Program, later renamed the National Psychodrama Training Center. Both programs followed the lead of the Moreno Institute in having an open admissions policy, welcoming anybody with a genuine interest in psychodrama. Over the years since the first Trial Lawyers College event, more and more lawyers have attended these workshops. Now half or more of the participants in our training workshops may be lawyers. At least ten lawyers have been certified by the American Board of Examiners in Psychodrama, Group Psychotherapy and Sociometry which has provisions for certifying individuals who are not psychotherapists. Several of these lawyers have been certified as Trainer, Educator, Practitioner, qualifying them to train others in the psychodramatic method.

In my opinion, lawyers learn to direct psychodrama more rapidly than psychotherapists do. There are several possible reasons why this is so. Trial lawyers, as a group, appear to be greater risk takers than do people trained in mental health and are

much quicker to volunteer as both protagonist and director. Psychotherapists will sometimes attend many training workshops before they are willing to take the role of director. Lawyers attending their first workshop will volunteer to direct. Lawyers also seem more eager than mental health professionals to be protagonists and do their own personal psychodrama explorations. Both roles involve active learning to direct.

The other advantage that lawyers have in learning to direct is their lack of training in psychotherapy. As I have written earlier in this paper, I encourage psychodrama trainees to think in terms of dramatizing an event from the protagonist's life rather than looking for symptoms of psychopathology as they have been taught. This discrepancy and the other ways in which psychodrama and other psychotherapeutic methods are at odds means that learning to direct calls for overcoming some established habits. Lawyers come to psychodrama training without these tendencies. They are already prepared to discover the protagonist's story. My supposition was supported when I had occasion to discuss my psychodramatic adventures with lawyers with Zerka Moreno. I informed her of my opinion that lawyers learned to direct faster than psychotherapists. "That's because they don't have so much to unlearn," she responded without pause or surprise.

Summing Up

I have been fortunate in having had opportunities to do many things in my professional career. I have practiced as a clinical psychologist both in public mental health and in private sector psychotherapy and have been on the faculty of a university as well as the Director of Training for the Moreno Institute. I have conducted long term psychodrama training programs in several different cities in America and training workshops in Europe, New Zealand, and Taiwan. I have published books on J. L. Moreno and psychodrama and I have had a significant role in establishing a new field for the practice of the psychodrama method by trial lawyers.

I began training in psychodrama in order to learn a more effective method of psychotherapy. This is probably the motivation that brings many individuals into psychodrama. Trial lawyers train in psychodrama in order to become more effective in

the courtroom. What all of us discover is that the most valuable result of our psychodrama training is not professional skills; it is the skill to be more fully ourselves. In other words, we learn to be more spontaneous. Many people whom I have directed in psychodramas will tell me later, "You have made me a better person." I demur. "I have not made you a better person," I reply. "Psychodrama has helped you discover the person that you can be."

References

- Franz, J. G. (1939). Spontaneity training in public speaking classes: A preliminary report. *Sociometry*, 2, 49-53.
- Garcia, A. (n.d.) The walk and talk: what it is and how to do it. Retrieved from <http://www.psychodramatraining.com/article2.htm>
- Kay, L. W. (1947). Role-playing as a teaching aid. *Sociometry*, 9, 263-74.
- Maier, N. (1952). *Principles of human relations: applications to management*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Moreno, J. L. (1934). *Who shall survive? A new approach to the problem of human interrelations*. Washington, DC: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Co.
- Moreno, J. L. (1937). Inter-personal therapy and the psychopathology of inter-personal relations. *Sociometry*, 1, 7-76. (Also, 1946, *Psychodrama*, Vol. 1. [pp. 177-232]).
- Moreno, J. L. (1940). Mental catharsis and the psychodrama. *Sociometry*, 3, 209-244
- Moreno, J. L. (1947). Open letter to group psychotherapists. *Sociatry*, 10, 268-272. (Also, 1966, Editor's foreword, in J. L. Moreno et al (Eds.) *The international handbook of group psychotherapy* (pp. 17-22). New York: Philosophical Library.)
- Moreno, J. L. (1950). The ascendance of group psychotherapy and the declining influence of psychoanalysis. *Group Psychotherapy*, 3, 121-125.
- Moreno, J. L. (1953a). Preludes of the sociometric movement. In J. L. Moreno, *Who shall survive? Foundations of sociometry, group psychotherapy and psychodrama*. Beacon, NY: Beacon House.
- Moreno, J. L. (1953b). *Who shall survive? Foundations of sociometry, group*

psychotherapy and psychodrama . Beacon, NY: Beacon House.

Moreno, J. L. (1954). Psychodramatic frustration test. *Group Psychotherapy*, 6, 137-167.

Moreno, J. L. (1956). The dilemma of existentialism, Daseinanalyse and the psychodrama, with special emphasis upon "existential validation." *International Journal of Sociatry and Sociometry*, 1, 55-63. (Also, 1959, *Psychodrama*, Vol. 2 [pp. 207-217].)

Moreno, J. L. (1957). Psychodrama of Adolf Hitler. *International Journal of Sociometry and Sociatry*, 1, 71-80.

Moreno, J. L. (1965). Therapeutic vehicles and the concept of surplus reality. *Group Psychotherapy*, 18, 211-216.

Moreno, J. L. (1989). Autobiography of J. L. Moreno, M.D. *Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama & Sociometry*, 42, 15-125.

Moreno, Z. T., Blomkvist, L., & Reutzel, T. (2000). *Psychodrama, Surplus Reality and the Art of Healing*. London/New York: Routledge.

Stahl, G. R. (1954). A statistical report of industry's experience with role playing. *Group Psychotherapy*, 6, 202-215.

Von Wiese, Leopold. (1952). Role playing as a method of academic education. *Group Psychotherapy*, 5, 73-77.

