

Training Dramas: Practice in psychodrama directing

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Introduction

Each student working toward competency in psychodrama directing builds a perception of the role of psychodramatist which develops as they progress through training. Intertwined are the elements of role perception which inform our expectations. These expectations impact our enactment. As persons train in psychodrama, sociometry and group psychotherapy we follow practice with "processing." We examine what is being learned, the perceptions being formed, and what is being substantiated, or discarded from the repertoire. We also consider ways in which the training setting creates safety for spontaneity and enriched learning experiences. We seek training experiences which build skills progressively, adding more and more stretch, variety and opportunities for integration.

The training drama as a process

The training drama is a format which is designed to be brief, while giving a director clear steps toward a single therapeutic goal. The structure of each sequence is pre-set with specific director tasks:

- (1) establish the role of the significant other by first taking the role
- (2) elicit at least one soliloquy;
- (3) call for at least one role reversal;
- (4) direct a moment of expansion; and,
- (5) close with a final statement. Then, sharing.

The purpose is to build confidence in action without having to manage a major life crisis. The formats are also useful in helping directors practice containing the action and to work within a shorter time frame.. Having the structures copied onto a flip chart and posted in the training setting, allows the novice director to take a quick peek in moments of anxiety.

Trainers are encouraged to create their own structures which target specific issues which emerge from their training sessions, such as managing conflict, owning up to the truth, setting limits on friends and family, asking for help, etc.

Some brief notes of the director functions in these exercises

Establishing the role of the significant other -

- (1) Establishing the role of the significant other -

••••• The director asks the protagonist to first take the role of the significant other in the scene. There are three main reasons: (1) so the auxiliary ego knows how to play the role; (2) to learn more about the person by being him or her; and (3) in order to have the role established before warming up the protagonist to their own role, and then having to switch out of their warmup state. The director pays attention to the demeanor, gestures, speech patterns and is responsible for monitoring the auxiliary ego. Their role playing needs to resemble the actions as presented.

(2) Soliloquies -

••••• The instruction for soliloquy is : "Turn your head to the side and speak aloud your inner thoughts and feelings." The other person is not going to be hearing you. Your soliloquy is private. Feel free to say anything that is true for you. It helps to hear yourself being able to express aloud what is going on inside. The director does not allow others in the scene to react to what is said.

(3) Role reversals -

••••• The timing and number of role reversals depends primarily on the content of the action. Some guidelines when to reverse roles are:

••••• a. when the auxiliary ego is not likely to know the answer to a question, or to correct an answer given extemporaneously.

••••• b. when something new or important is revealed. (Ex. "I didn't call you because I was in jail.")

••••• c. when the person is speaking in a role but not in the role.

••••• d. It is recommended that the director not call for a role reversal when the protagonist is in feelings, even in feelings in the role of the other person and the feeling state is congruent with the role.

(4) Moments of expansion -

••••• The exact form the expansion takes will come from cues given by the protagonist. These are often non-verbals cues. For example, The person is confronting another person, and swiping their hand across the table top when they are emphasizing a point. The director suggests: "Do that some more, and make the gesture really big. Be dramatic. Put some words to it."

••••• The command language used here: "Louder!" "Make that gesture again, and do it bigger." "Stand up. Put your full body into it." Or for quieter emotions, "Begin to do what your body really wants to do right now." The important thing for the director is that they don't have to structure a specific action. Rather, they adjust the action to fit what the protagonist is already indicating they need to do.

(5) Close with a final statement -

••••• The transition from action to closing sometimes feels awkward, especially in shorter sequences. The protagonist knows this is a brief piece of work. They also need the director's help in bringing it to a close. The director might remind the protagonist that this relationship is ongoing (if it is) and that making a statement is closure for the enactment.

(6) Sharing -

The director needs to notice the time and make a suggestion for the time available for sharing.

If there are many people, the sharing can be accomplished in groups of three or four, with the protagonist having a small group around them. The director monitors the sharing.

Processing the directing

Processing the directing

It is helpful to maintain a positive and upbeat tone during the time devoted to processing. The purpose of the structure is to chunk it down to a manageable slice of life, and to practice essential elements. Another student can moderate the processing or the trainer takes that role. If several students want time to do training dramas then part of the moderator's job will be holding to a time frame. Have the protagonist speak about the benefit of the work, and where they might go from here. Ask for comments to their director. Then have the director speak about the following:

- (1) What did you like best that you did? (2) Talk about the choices you had for expansion. (3) If you think about your perceptions about psychodrama directing, what ideas do you now have to add to these perceptions. Follow this with, "Now let's hear from a few others."

Director

language

I like to include this short section as I've noticed that novice directors, in their tentative beginnings, extend their tentativeness in their communication. I find it helpful to encourage directors to develop language skills that assert their role while maintaining compassionate connection with the protagonist and members of the developing story.

Directors ask questions, make comments and give commands. For brief enactments such as these part of the training is to use language which promotes action. Directors are encouraged to limit questions, especially those such as, "Would you like to reverse roles?" This communicates tentativeness (as well as politeness) and prompts the protagonist to think, rather than switch places.

Examples: (1) Director: What would your Mother say now? - question (2) Director: This would make my Mother mad. - comment

(3) Director: Take your Mother's role. Speak aloud what she would say. - command

Jonathan Fox has students participate in a brief training exercise, three students at a time. Pointing at one he says "Ask a question!" And to another "Give a command!" "Make a comment!" The practice goes at a rapid pace. When they are able to quickly respond another three students come before the group.

Designing a Training Drama

- (1) Identify the learning goal, being clear about the type of issues which might surface for the protagonists.
- (2) Set up the single scene staging you imagine, including entrances into the scene. Be clear about the props you will need and have them available.
- (3) Write the instructions on a flip chart in large enough lettering to be readable from the stage.
- (4) Establish a time frame, such as "no longer than ____ minutes from beginning to the end of sharing."
- (5) Practice the training drama yourself before introducing it to a group. Make any additions or changes based on the trial run.

B a b y T a l k

Â Â Â The purpose: Directing a tender moment; age regression.

Â Â Â The staging: A rocking chair, a small pillow, wrapped in a cloth.
Â Â Â to be "the baby".

The warm up: The director asks the group members to think about Â Â Â a person they would have liked to have hold them when he or she was Â Â Â a newborn. It can be someone who was in their life at that time, or someone who had no way of being available then. Find someone you wished could have held you then. The director chooses the protagonist from volunteers.

The action:

The director: Sit here and become this person. Tell us who you are. Place the wrapped pillow in their arms and say, "This is _____ who is not very old." Talk to him/her. It is very private so you can say anything that comes to you.

Choose someone now to take this role for you. Now become yourself as a newborn. (Help the protagonist warm up to being their newborn self.) The protagonist may sit on the auxiliary ego's lap, or position themselves on

the floor with their head on the person’s knee. The auxiliary ego begins to speak from their role using the same gestures and phrasing as shown by the protagonist in the initial role reversal.

A. Have the protagonist make a soliloquy.

B. Call for at least one role reversal.

C. Choose one moment for an expansion of the feeling state.

Make a final statement.

Sharing.

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B a d N e w s

• • • • • The purpose: Facing a fear; practicing a type of scene which occurs frequently in psychodrama.

• • • • • The staging: Two telephones, or cell phones. Two chairs not facing to represent separate geographic locations.

The warmup: The director asks group members to identify a phone call they could get sometime in the future which would fall into the category of “bad news”. The director chooses a volunteer.

The action: The director states: First become the person who is calling you. The director establishes the role, getting sufficient information for the auxiliary who will be taking the role, and finding out exactly what the “bad

newsâ€• is.Â Then, Choose someone to take this role. Follow this by having the protagonist return to their own role and go to the time when you are likely to receive this phone call.

A.Â Enact the phone call.

B. Ask for at least one soliloquy.

C. Call for at least one role reversal.

D. Choose one moment of expansion of the feeling state.

E. Close with a final statement.

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Me , You , andÂ Â MyÂ Â WiseÂ Â Self

Â Â Â Â Â Â The Purpose: To practice an encounter with an absent significant other;

Â To use mirroring as part of the action and as a closure device.

Â Â Â Â Â Â The staging: Two spaces (perhaps with two chairs) identified for the two

Â parties, and one chair, facing the audience, placed where the person seated on it is

Â able to view the action.

The warmup: Think of a relationship that is causing you some problems at the moment.

Decide if it is something you could explore in a brief action piece with me as your director.. Tell the others who you have in mind. The director chooses a volunteer to direct.

The action: Become this person who you have difficulty with. Establish the role, and get their position on the issues. Next, warm the protagonist up to their own role and get them to state their position. Choose the auxiliary ego. Also, choose someone who can be you later in the action.

Enact the encounter.

B. Ask for at least one soliloquy.

C. Call for at least one role reversal.

D. Choose one moment of expansion of the feeling state.

Now let us have the wise self. Take this seat here and watch the action. Tune into all the wisdom that comes down to us from both the earthly plane and the spiritual plane.

E. Have the auxiliaries mirror the interaction. Call for at least one pause for the wise self commentary.

E. Close with a final statement from the wise self to the auxiliary playing the protagonist.

Have them reverse role ending with the protagonist in their own role.

Sharing

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Think of a relationship that is causing you some problems at the moment.

Enemy

The Purpose: To direct action which may contain interacting with part of self.

with a mood, with an embodied inanimate object.

The staging: A motel room, with bed, a desk, a chair, and a

clearly marked doorway. Low lighting
to reflect nighttime.

The warmup: Imagine you have been traveling all day and that you have stopped overnight at a motel. When you enter your room it is occupied with an enemy of yours. Who, or what comes to mind. Maybe it is a fifth of scotch, or a neighbor wanting their child to play with yours. The director chooses a volunteer.

The action: The protagonist first takes the role of "the enemy" waiting in the room.

(1) Where are you in this room? (2) Tell me what you plan to do when _____ comes into the room. Now, choose someone to play this role.

A. Warm up the protagonist to the role of weary traveler. The scene begins when the protagonist enters the room.

B. Ask for at least one soliloquy.

C. Call for at least one role reversal.

D. Choose one moment of expansion of the feeling state.

E. Close with a final statement.

Sharing

Note: This structure was one I participated in during my training days at the Moreno Institute. It brought excitement and accomplished what "ghost stories" provided kids at camp. I remember some of the enemies: the woman my husband is having an affair with; a triple hot fudge sundae; guilt; a deer I shot when I was eight years old. I do not know the originator. Ann E. Hale

to reflect nighttime.

Future Chair

The Purpose: Warming up to directing future projection sequences; Managing auxiliary egos.

The staging: The stage will be divided by the protagonist into areas representing "specific pulls". One empty chair is provided to represent "the future chair".

The warmup: Think about some decisions you have before you. Exploring them in action allows you to experience a variety of choices without pressure to make a commitment. What comes to mind? The director choose a volunteer.

The action: The protagonist identifies parts of the stage to represent each of the pulls impacting the choice.

A. Choose an auxiliary ego to embody each "pull". Show the auxiliary what they say and do to get their point across. During the action:

B. Ask for at least one soliloquy.

C. Call for at least one role reversal.

D. Choose one moment of expansion of the feeling state.

E. Close with a final statement.

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Scene-setting with a Sociometric Twist

• • • • • The purpose: • • Directing experience setting a scene; supporting group
• • • • • building during dramatic action; using a feature of Playback Theater;
• • • • • practice using a model for working with group members'™s act hunger.
• • • • • practice directing a form of action sharing.

• • • • • The staging: The stage is available for staging a person's™ scene. Just offstage, are two chairs side by side: one for the director (the seat between the audience and the action) and one for the protagonist (the teller's™ chair, using the Playback theater staging) .

The warmup: Think of a place that holds special memories for you. • Call it to mind and allow yourself to mentally visit it briefly. • Where are you in this scene? • The director chooses a volunteer to be the protagonist.

The action: • • To the group: As the protagonist sets the scene allow yourself to mentally go with them. • Look for a response you have to an element of the scene which you would like to portray during the second portion of this exercise.

A. • Set the scene. • Place something to represent the key elements of the scene. What do you see? • What do you hear? What do you smell? • • What do you feel? • Be clear where the entrances are to the scene.

B. • Become this object here and soliloquize.

C. Do at least one role reversal..

D. • For the moments of expansion, I am going to ask you to sit with me over here and we will watch as members of the group, one at a time, come up to portray an aspect of the scene which occurred to them as they watched you build the scene. Each person will return to their seat before the next person comes up.

E. After the action sharing: Now go back into the scene, look around, feel the presence of some of the elements brought in by the group members. • Close with a final statement.

The sharing was in action. Check if additional sharing is needed.

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Some notes on using training dramas

A protagonist in a training drama is invited to warm-up fully for a brief single-scene action sequence. There is no guarantee that once warmed up the protagonist will be able to manage a state of being “overheated”. As important as the priority is for working in a time frame, what has supremacy is being humane. The psychodramatic rule is “First, do no harm.” One skill the director needs to develop is to include the group in the decision-making when the stated contract needs to change. This is good director practice.

Once the training dramas become part of the psychodramatist-in-training repertoire a student may offer to direct one of the formats, especially if the format seems to fit a central concern which emerges. Also, if students meet for practice groups outside of regularly scheduled training sessions, the training dramas are excellent devices for strengthening their skills. Some of the training dramas are easily adapted for use in individual counseling sessions where there are few if any auxiliary egos available.

It is tempting to take advantage of the training group’s energy for discussion of other directions the action might take, “given more time”. I suggest that care be taken to monitor the discussion in order to safeguard the recent experience for the protagonist, and to prevent warming up the recent protagonist who is settling into the closure phase. A structure, such as “break into small groups” and discuss options you might develop had this been a full length drama. Have the protagonist select their own group of two or three if they want to participate. The protagonist’s group reports out, and the other groups take in the ideas as information for their own ideas. The trainer can change the direction of discussion by asking, “What skills might you want to develop, in order to direct more complicated psychodramatic action?”

The trainer’s demeanor during training dramas

When directors are beginning to practice they get nervous. While intervening may come from a helpful place within the trainer, each time the trainer helps, the director, though grateful, also tucks away the idea, “I can’t do this.” Suggest to the director before they even begin, that if they get stuck, they have a chat with their protagonist, or take a minute to look at the format on the wall, and pick up where they left off.

It is difficult at times to withstand the looks of “appeal” which come from around the room of trainees, who are wondering how you, their trainer, is experiencing what is going on. Hard though it may be, the most useful demeanor is “smiling” and “enjoying the learning in action”. Making copious notes, frowning, rolling your eyes, and other gestures impact the novice director in subtle ways. I like to have the whole group “practice” the most positive demeanor that each would want if they were directing. A “mistakes allowed” atmosphere produces some of

Sharing:

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