PSYCHODRAMA TRAINING TIPS

by

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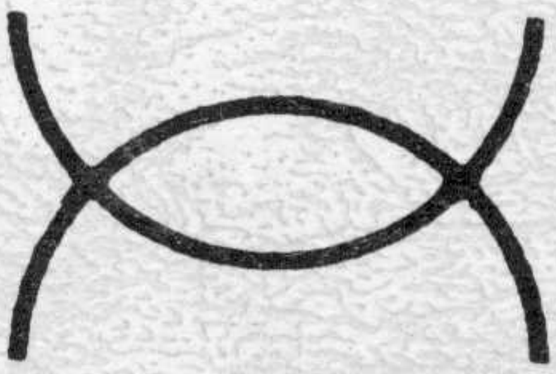

Director Gives Inspiration. The director needs to inspire his auxiliaries, clients and audiences. You can inspire only if you have reached deep within yourself and extended beyond yourself. If you have experienced the freeing effect of psychodrama you will want this for others. Your enthusiasm will be contageous and will begin to be seen in those you work with. If you believe in the psychodrama method, you will be eager to share what you know. If you approach each session as a new adventure, you will seldom get bored and you will find your tiredness disappears as soon as you get some action going. Once you have come to terms with yourself and those important to you, the energy you once spent on defensiveness will be released. You will experience a strong energy flow and a reserve of spontaneity. Inspiring others to psychodrama will become second nature. If you come up against an energy crisis within yourself, you know where to look for solutions. If a good night's sleep doesn't do it, you probably need to work on something psychodramatically.

Take It All the Way. Don't settle for an enemic psychodrama. "Primum non nocere" ("First do no harm") doesn't mean don't do anything. Never open something up and then not let it be expressed. Don't minimize the pain. Instead, go into the worst and stay with it to the bitter end. At times you will encourage the protagonist to go into his pain, intensifying it until he has to get rid of it. A surgeon doesn't say, "I won't amputate because it might hurt you." Your protagonist will seldom be more courageous than you are. If a protagonist asks "Am I ready to deal with this?," then he is probably ready. If he tries to go into his trauma too fast, slow him down; it may be an avoidance.

The Director's Job is to Direct. When playing the role of psychodrama director, your point of concentration must be direction. For the most part, you should let your auxiliaries do the auxiliary work, the doubles do the doubling, and so forth. As much as possible, let your directing be crisp and structured. It doesn't hurt to let everybody else know what you're doing, and, even at times, why. There is a difference between following the protagonist and being coerced by him. Most protagonists like to feel that the director has things well in hand and under control. This is just as

true for the protagonist who seems to want to take over. He may be testing the director to see if he's going to let him call the shots, and that is just what he doesn't want. In a recent psychodrama in a couples group, for example, the wife told her husband to sit down before the director hadn't quite finished the scene he was doing. The director reminded her that he was the director and that he wanted her to sit down until after the scene was completed. This was done even though the director had all the information he needed for that scene. He was in effect, giving the para-message, "I'm directing this session." This is important, as it establishes the contract. This does not mean that the director doesn't follow the protagonist, keeping alert to what the protagonist has warmed up to. The director should always be prepared to back off if the direction he is taking is too far away from the protagonist's warm-up. The director should also be ready to back off if he is getting into an area that can't be adequately handled during the session.

Who are you, where are you, what's going on? In starting either an improvisation or a psychodrama, it's important to know the who, where and what. The what is the mutual activity between the actors that exists within the where. It is the reason for being somewhere. "What are you doing there?" The where consists of the physical objects within the environment of a scene or activity, it is the immediate environment. Who, of course, is the people within the where. "Who are you? Who is he? What is the relationship?"

The Problem of the Dysfunctional Auxiliary. Sometimes the auxiliary isn't doing a very good job. This puts the director in a bind, if dismissing the dysfunctional auxiliary would be harmful to the group member. Often a little diplomacy is all that is needed, but there are also ploys that can spare feelings. For example, let one of the trained auxiliaries double the auxiliary role--even though this is not ordinarily a good procedure. Then role reverse the auxiliary and double roles so that you wind up with a trained auxiliary becoming the lead auxiliary. This could be followed with a short side scene that doesn't use the questioned auxiliary role. When you re-establish the scene, call back the trained auxiliary only.

Detachment. (Putting yourself in brackets.) We try to provide as much time in training group as possible for students to work

through some of their personal unfinished business, either by having the opportunity to be protagonist, or to have someone listen to them reflectively. It is, of course, an ideal that the psychodramatists go into their sessions with their own personal problems under control. The point of concentration helps the psychodramatist to do this. Detachment is crucial for the trained auxiliaries and directors. It prevents both acting and acting out. Paraphrasing Spolin, it is the ability to relate objectively to the problems being presented, and to avoid emoting. Artistic detachment makes role playing possible; keeps everyone a part of the psychodrama game. It helps you to become aware of the life of the protagonist and to become aware of how life is in his environment. It enables you to function within the group without being swallowed up by the group. It helps you to get more involved in the session in general, and in the psychodrama in particular. It, along with the point of concentration, helps you to become absorbed in the session rather than in yourself. Detachment doesn't mean that you don't display emotion, which, of course, you do in psychodrama. It merely means that you don't impose yourself on the protagonist or the audience. The kind of emotion that is most helpful in your auxiliary work is an organic emotion which is created by playing. Subjective emotions that you carry into the sessions, onto the psychodrama scene, are not communication. Keeping the protagonist on focus increases the chances that the psychodrama will move towards a resolution.

Darkening the Lights. Be ready to darken the stage and the house lights to give the protagonist any privacy he might need at the moment. This could be a time, for example, when the protagonist is getting into a painful memory or expressing himself in a manner he would just as soon not be seen in public. Sometimes the appropriate closure calls for a cathartic release of affection between protagonist and auxiliary. This may be more freely expressed if the lights are dimmed. It also gives the audience a chance to ruminate, or go into other people in the group, or feeling guilty about looking in. The lights can also be shut off to indicate the passing of time in the manner of a fade out on TV with the director announcing "X" time has passed.

Become an Object in the Room. (If that picture could talk.) At any time during the psychodrama, but particularly when you are set-

ting up the where of an enactment, the protagonist can be asked to become an object in the room. For example, he might be the picture hanging over the mantel. From that vantage point, he can describe himself, or the room, or some of the things that he has seen in the room. This can get at the general feeling tone; it gives the protagonist a chance to describe objectively what the scene is. It helps to warm up the protagonist, and it produces a multi-dimensional "where."

When setting the where of an enactment, be sensitive to the presence of significant objects. The protagonist may or may not reverse roles with the objects. If there are bookshelves in the room, it might be well to ask the protagonist to go over and pick up a book, open it to a page and describe what is on the page. This ploy often gives us some pretty significant clues as to the characterization of the protagonist.

Reversing Roles to get away from a scripted psychodrama. When it is apparent that a protagonist has preplanned his psychodrama, one way to get him out of the script is to have him reverse roles frequently. This can be with important others, or with the objects, or anything that you can think of. This gets him out of himself and away from the script.

Reversing Roles so that the protagonist can actually hear something of importance. This came to mind last week when a director failed to reverse roles after the protagonist in the role of the important other had made a statement that she obviously would like to have heard from that person. In the role of her former boyfriend, the protagonist said, "Yes, I loved you, and I always will." She could have been reversed immediately back to herself so that she could hear the same line from the auxiliary playing the boyfriend. The important point is that it's different experiencing it when you actually hear it than when you say it in the other role.

"Say it again--Say it louder." Every once in a while the protagonist will come up with a striking or significant sentence or phrase. The director may want to underscore this by having him repeat it. This gives the protagonist a chance to slow up and hear what he is saying. If this weren't done, the significant phrase might get lost. It is also another way for the director to signify that

he would like his protagonist to slow down a bit. In addition, it can give a clue to the auxiliaries as to what the director feels is important, and possibly serve as a guide post for how to be playing the role. We had an example of this in last week's psychodrama where the protagonist almost inaudibly muttered, "My goodness, mom, I'm a big girl now." The director asked her to repeat the phrase and then to repeat it louder. The auxiliary playing the role of mother had to be alert to the fact that this was something the director was underscoring. To underscore the above statement even more, the director interviewed to protagonist in the role of mother about the remark which was just made by her daughter.

Making the Rounds. (Gestalt game) In the white heat of a psychodrama, the protagonist has an "Ah ha!" experience, having come to some therapeutic realization of importance. Quite often we would have him act out a scene which puts his new insight into action. Short of this, we could merely have him go to each of the group members to try out whatever new behavior is suggested by the insight. Recently, for example, the protagonist exclaimed, "I am a worthwhile person in my own right!" "I'll buy that," says the director; "Let's check this out with the rest of the group. Stand in front of each member, and ask 'do you think I'm worthwhile, and if you do, why?' After you've asked this, just listen to what they have to say." This is called "making the rounds." Anytime the director feels that the protagonist could learn something from the group, he may request the protagonist to "make the rounds." The director may suggest "say what you just said to each one of us, and add some other remark pertaining to your feelings about each person." There is a lot of flexibility in the application of this gambit. The crucial element is that something is being checked out with each member of the group. In addition to verbal interaction, the exercise can include such things as touching, caressing, fighting, questioning or any other behavior that needs to be "tried on for size."

Check It Out Now. This is like "making the rounds" in that the director gets information from the protagonist by having him do something away from the formal action space that is suggested by something occurring during the enactment. For example, the protagonist was in a scene in which he was interacting with his absent wife, played by an auxiliary. In a role reversal with the

auxiliary playing his wife, he broke out of the role and stated, "I don't know what she would think or say about that." The director stopped the action and sent the protagonist to the phone to get the required information from his wife. While he was doing this, the director engaged the group in a structured experience relative to the enactment scene. When the protagonist returned, he recapitulated the phone call psychodramatically. Several things were accomplished by this simple "check it out now." The requested information was obtained, and both the protagonist and the group learned that it is often easier to check it out than to guess what a person is thinking. The protagonist was forced into an important encounter with his wife that he might have easily avoided in real life. Even more than the required information was brought back. With his new insights, the protagonist was asked to redo the original scene where he was interacting with his wife.

In yet another example of check it out now, the protagonist claimed he couldn't survive being alone with an attractive female. He was invited to check it out by spending twenty minutes in my office with one of the most attractive female group members. He survived.

Lining up Future Psychodramas. Often a psychodrama is rich with clues that tell us the directions that can be taken. As director, we select only some of them. After a psychodrama, you can spend some time in making suggestions for future psychodramas.

Personal Heroes. A good exercise to help members of the group share some of themselves with the rest of the group is to have them present their personal heroes through role playing. In a variation of this, you could have other people then warm up to the role and interact with the other heroes or interact with the protagonist. If this is an ongoing group, you might do well to remember who these personal heroes were and bring them in during a later psychodrama when the protagonist needs some strength or support.

If a protagonist can't confront someone in his own role, perhaps he can confront that person in the role of somebody else. This could be somebody from his social atom or some idealized figure.

The mirror. If you see the protagonist in a particularly revealing bodily position, have him freeze. Then get an assistant from the audience to get into his body position. Then let the protagonist interpret what he sees.

Always take the protagonist "where he is at," and not where you think he ought to be. I've seen a protagonist do a psychodrama two years later that I thought would have been right the first time. But he wasn't ready. Be patient and wait. Find out what the protagonist is warmed up to, not what you're warmed up to. It simply won't do any good to point a protagonist in a direction that he is not ready to take.

Be sensitive to the richness of our language and be ready, where appropriate, to concretize what is said. For example, if the protagonist says, "I could just scream," it might be appropriate to have him scream. You can think of plenty of other examples, here are a few: "She's always on my back." Have the auxiliary hang on his back. "There's a wall between us." Let a whole line of assistants form into a wall. Just be on the alert for phrases that can be concretized. This doesn't mean that you have to concretize every phrase, but it's surprising how a well-placed concretization can help to surface the feelings.

Who Else is Mad with "Mom"? Often a director will have a protagonist who just can't (won't) express anger towards "Mom." The director may ask him, "Who else is mad with mom?" If the protagonist names someone else who is "mad at mom," reverse him to the role of this other person and let him get the anger out through the role of the other person.

Time frames for the 90 minute session. Of course, the needs of the moment will modify this, but the following is a fairly appropriate allocation of time: Warmup, 10 minutes; psychodrama production, 60 minutes; sharing and termination, 20 minutes.

Breaking through a generalized statement to get at the real feelings. "It often happens," says John Enright, "that a person will talk in a generalized and distant way about what people do and how they feel. That's to avoid activating the tension that he would experience if he spoke directly to another person in the group."

In a case like this, I try to direct his style of thinking in order to put him in better touch. It might go something like this:

Group Member: When someone does that to you, you certainly feel put down.
Leader: Try saying "I" instead of "you."
Group Member: Well, when someone does that to me, I . . .
Leader: Who did that to you?
Group Member: Last week Carol did it twice.
Leader: Tell Carol.
Group Member: Carol, I felt put down when you ignored me last week.

Fantasy Role Differentiation. Sometimes during a psychodrama it becomes apparent that the protagonist has overgeneralized similarities between a present important other and one from the past. When it is apparent that negative assocations with the past person is interfering with the present role relationship, I've used the following fantasy technique. For example, a woman protagonist is confusing her husband with her not-too-desirable father. Put the protagonist in a light trance, or if you don't know how to do this, merely have her relax, close her eyes and imagine that in her "mind's eye" she sees a large, white screen. On the left side of the screen, she sees an image of her father; on the right side of the screen, she sees an image of her husband. Now the two images begin to fuse in the center of the screen. Make sure the protagonist sees this composite image fairly clearly. Now have the two images separate out, but this time the images are clearly distinct and the subject can see a dark outline around the two images. Now the undesirable image, in this case the father, is becoming smaller and smaller. As things become smaller, they seem farther away. The father image becomes so small that it's merely a small dot at the left side of the screen. He's there and available but not very important. You could, at this point, have the husband auxiliary come forward and begin to interact with the protagonist who, now with a clearer perception, can begin to interact more positively.

Get your protagonist in action as soon as possible. Don't sit there and rap with him too long. You can do your case building as you go along. Often you can get the facts and feelings that you need to know as director, or,for the auxiliaries, by pla-

cing the protagonist in a role reversal and learning about him from the vantage point of someone who knows the protagonist.

Split the Ambivalence. When the protagonist shows an ambivalence, split him into two parts of himself and let him have a dialogue with the two parts.

Falling Out of Role. Note what is happening in psychodrama when a protagonist falls out of role. This is apt to give you an important clue. What is it that the protagonist cannot face at the moment. You can use this as data for future psychodramas or to direct the protagonist into an area that is peripheral but related to the issue on which he is blocking. It is also important to identify what your individual therapeutic assistants tend to block on. This is often a clue for an area with which they have to deal psychodramatically.

Word Watchfullness. Develop a sense of word watchfullness in your directing. Remember, if he has been properly warmed up, your protagonist is in a heightened state of concentration and absorption in the action, and therefore is both highly suggestable and apt to take things very literally. One ploy is to implicitly role reverse with the protagonist and imagine how you would react to the direction that you have just given.

As director, you must develop a habit of word watchfullness. Consider your patient's intellectual level and how well he knows psychodrama nomenclature, since it can be rather obscure to the uninitiated. Give directions that keep the action going and discourage story telling. For example, following some interviewing, if you should say, "What happens next?" you would get a description. On the other hand, if you would say, "Who speaks next?" you can get your protagonist into that role and continue the action. The director's words can easily "load the dice" or prejudice the enactment even before enough evidence has been presented. For example, the director is setting up a scene where the protagonist, as a boy, is being left by his parents at a boarding school. The director asks "What happened after your parents dumped you here?" He might better have asked "What happens next?" or check out his hypothesis in action by putting the protagonist in the role of one of his parents driving away and then interviewing him in the parent's role. Other examples of better

ways of saying things will appear under the rubric of word watchfullness.

Slow Motion Enactments. It is sometimes helpful to have the protagonist and his auxiliaries re-do a scene in very slow motion. This forces the participants to stop and think about what is going on. It give the para-message, "I think this is an important interaction." It highlights the movement part of the enactment. With this ploy in use, the director can also ask for a "freeze" so that the protagonist and the group can study the sociometry of the enactment in much the way a film editor would clutch the projector to study a frame. This was done, for example, with a protagonist who was interested in exploring two sides of himself at home, the one that was content and the one that was a miserable bastard. He keeps throwing the bastard out, but everyone else keeps bringing him back in. The scene needed to be slowed down to see exactly how this was accomplished.

Interviewing in Other Role. It is a good idea to check out how the important others in the life of the protagonist perceive him. You can do this in the role reversal by interviewing the protagonist in the role of the important other.

Role Playing Phone Call. When in a role playing enactment, the protagonist is talking on the phone. Put the auxiliary ego and the protagonist back to back. On a phone we hear but do not see the important other.

Focusing on the Differences. This tactic is suggested by Donell Miller from Johnston College, University of Redlands, in Group Psychotherapy and Group Psychodrama, vol. XXV, No. 1-2, 1972. "Here the director asks the protagonist to choose two auxiliaries: one to represent himself, and the other to represent the 'negative identity.' Place the two back to back center stage. Require the protagonist to mention as many essential differences as he can, and with each difference named, the auxiliaries are to take one step away from each other. (Of course, if the protagonist 'slips up' and lists a similarity rather than a difference, that is 'penalized' by the auxiliaries retracing a step.) Whether the protagonist produces many differences or few, his reaction normally includes a discovery, which can readily be capitalized on by the director.

When the protagonist has seen many differences, the director comments, 'You're not very much alike after all!' When the protagonist cannot produce many differences, the director comments on the protagonist's strong need to see sameness and the very high price he's paying to maintain that perception. What makes him willing to 'buy' such a 'bad bargain?' The alert director does not permit a verbal rationalization, however, but challenges the protagonist to show us what sameness allows him to say and do . . . etc." Miller points out that this "distancing technique" is particularly valuable when you're with a depressed or suicidal patient who may be overidentified with or overdependent upon someone in his social atom towards whom he has strong, ambivalent feelings.

Focusing on the Similarities. Donell Miller devised this technique for the purpose of calling a person's attention to the transference phenomenon. "Have the protagonist select two auxiliary egos, one to represent the significant figure from the patient's past and the other, that present figure who is the object of much stronger feelings than his behavior would seem to call for. With an auxiliary at one end of the room and the other auxiliary at the opposite extreme, the patient stands in the middle with the assignment of listing as many similarities and differences he can between the two such important persons in his life. With each similarity, the auxiliaries step forward; with each difference, they step back. Of course, the exercise serves to establish the emotional identity between the two and forcibly brings it to the patient's awareness. But this is exactly what we do not want to achieve with a depressed patient. Therefore, the 'distancing technique' is substituted for the 'identification technique.' "

Splitting the Ambivalent Objects. (Miller) We often have the auxiliaries make a transformation from the hated important other to one more psychodramatically satisfying; e.g., the director might say to the auxiliary, "make a transformation; become the psychodramatic mother." Following a suggestion by D. Miller, you can accomplish the same end by splitting the ambivalent objects. In an example given by him, the protagonist expressed considerable guilt. "Therefore the director suggested splitting the father-figure with the auxiliary already chosen as the father-who-deserted him but with another auxiliary as the father-who-loved-him. This

allowed the patient to embrace the one part of the dead father and receive father's love and approbation without the complication of anger, hurt and loss the other part of father signified. Then the two fathers joined arms and told the patient that the patient must carry on and do what father cannot do, make a new life for himself. 'The grandchildren need a father now more than ever. Give to them as I would give to you, had I the chance to do it all over again.' Then followed the 'distancing technique' alluded to above, with the original father auxiliary turned one way and the new auxiliary, representing the patient, turned the other way. Thus the patient was finally able to let his father go."

The Psychodramatic Baby. This is the fantasy baby which a person may carry deep inside. Zerka Moreno writes in The International Handbook of Group Psychotherapy (New York: Philosophical Library, 1966.) "Therapy lies in helping the mother to bring the perception of the psychodramatic baby and that of the real baby closer together, first by permitting the psychodramatic baby to live in the retraining situation. Once it has been born and is outside her, finished like a real child, she can begin the separation from it; we cannot let go of those precious things with which we have not yet finished. Therapy consists for all out patients, in whatever category, in learning to complete unfinished business and then settling down to the tasks at hand which require their attention here and now. Once she has been able to deliver herself of the fantasy baby, she will be readier to become available as the mother of her live baby." If a mother is sacrificing her real life children because they fall short of her ideal, the psychodramatist plays midwife and lets her have her psychodramatic baby on stage. After delivery and subsequent scenes at significant life stages with frequent role reversals that let her become the child, the mother can return to the image of her real children on stage. Perhaps for the first time she may be able to accept them as they are. As D. Miller points out, "Freedom from the fantasy comes through affirmation by the group, never through denial."

Expressing Ethical Anger for the Protagonist. While we don't ordinarily want to rob the protagonist of his opportunity for the free expression of an appropriate emotion, there are times when the protagonist for good reason cannot avail himself of the opportunity to express rage. Even the protagonist who might otherwise be spontaneous, may find it necessary to balk at an expression

that he feels would be damaging to himself. If so, it's quite appropriate for the director or one of his designates to express the emotion for him. After all, like good parents we don't expect more than can be delivered and we are prepared to serve as models and take over the functions that can't yet be performed.

So, when it begins to become obvious to everyone in the group that the protagonist has been dealt an unfair blow by an important other person in his life, it is quite legitimate for the director to make a scathing attack on the person in the antagonist role. This may be an exhilarating experience for the protagonist who may never have experienced anyone being in his corner. It often has an immediate freeing effect on the protagonist so that he can be more productive in both the present and future psychodramas. For example, a lady who had been both physically and mentally abused over a period of years could in no way talk back to her husband or even someone playing the role of her husband. The psychodrama director, a latent Don Quixote, lit into him in no uncertain terms. She herself could then express some long pent-up emotions.

Close it out in three minutes. Whenever we do warm-ups, improvs, or self presentations it is the director's job to be time keeper. Thus, if he wants four self presentations and a half an hour for sharing he should begin each one by saying "You have about fifteen minutes" and when twelve minutes is up, he should say something like, "Close it out in three minutes." Even when a fairly stiff time limit hasn't been set, the director can sense that the actors have come to a climax or resolution, but without the proper side coaching they might just keep going. At such time the actors often welcome the instruction, "Close it out in three minutes."