

Best Practices for Psychodrama in Academia: The Role Transition from Trainer to Professor

Professional Liaison Committee
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This document is intended to provide guidance and direction on best practice approaches for psychodrama trainers interested in teaching psychodrama within academic settings. In role theory terms, this document of best practices essentially serves to differentiate the roles of *psychodrama practitioner*, *psychodrama trainer*, and *psychodrama professor*.

Statement of Importance

If Moreno's methods are to thrive in the American mental health field, we must increase the visibility, credibility, and reputation of sociometry and psychodrama. The academic system has mostly accepted group psychotherapy within education programs in counseling, psychology, social work, and related fields while the other pieces of Moreno's triadic system are almost completely absent. This document will focus primarily on sociometry and psychodrama. The presence of sociometry and psychodrama in American academia would introduce new cohorts of students to the methods each semester while increasing our professionalism and establishing stronger relationships with researchers.

It is important that psychodrama practitioners and trainers do not treat their psychodrama university classes as if they are personal growth groups or training groups. While participating in psychodrama and sociometric methodology can be therapeutic, the goal in the classroom is educational. The classroom needs to be approached as an educational group with considerations to the norms, expectations, and limitations of the academic context. At the same time, many skills developed in the roles of psychodrama practitioner and trainer can be transferable into the role of psychodrama professor.

Transferable Skills

Through our training, a psychodramatist develops an enhanced sense of group dynamics and sociometry within the group which is a valuable teaching tool. There is a "group within the classroom," thus many group work skills are transferable to teaching. The interpersonal dynamics within the classroom impact the learning environment; a psychodramatist can create structures within the classroom to enhance safety, spontaneity, connection, and cohesion between students. Using Moreno's methods as teaching tools, the classroom comes to life and students become positioned to educate each other. The experiential nature of teaching psychodrama is

also transferable to the classroom. Creating teaching structures using sociometry or role-playing allows students to interact with the content in a different way. Many students appreciate experiential learning as most traditional courses are almost entirely lecture or discussion based.

Emotional Experiencing

Psychodrama's absence in American academia can, in part, be attributed to the intense levels of emotional experiencing common in the psychodrama training process. Some elements of traditional psychodrama training need to be modified for appropriateness within the classroom context - especially around containment of emotional expression and catharsis. A session from an ongoing psychodrama training group and a session from a university psychodrama course should have fundamental differences. In many cases, students will go from their psychodrama elective directly into another class and need to maintain their role of student for the rest of the day.

Some of academia's rejection of psychodrama is traceable to the many psychodrama guest lectures, conference presentations, and university courses where the educational session inappropriately became a therapy session. Psychodramatists have 'followed their protagonists' into uncontained catharsis or trauma-related scenes in academic settings neglecting the educational contract, violating the norms of the academic setting, and even causing harm to participants. A classroom is a group; and sociometric/psychodramatic group facilitation skills are useful to enhance the learning experience, but the primary focus and goal must always remain on teaching, not personal growth.

This does not mean that the session must be lecture-based. Most academic disciplines are very receptive to experiential teaching approaches and Moreno's methods of sociometry and psychodrama can certainly be used for experiential learning. However, the experience needs to conform to the setting and the emotional expression should be contained.

Course Content Considerations

Traditional academic programs and courses, even in the mental health fields, focus more so on teaching history, theory, and philosophy than on clinical skills. On the other hand, post-graduate training and traditional psychodrama training orients itself more heavily on clinical skills training. The *psychodrama trainer* emphasizes skills training while the *psychodrama professor* balances history, theory, and philosophy with skills training.

When demonstrating psychodrama and sociometry in an academic setting, there are boundaries that must be maintained. It is suggested that psychodrama teachers focus on strength-based roles, positive relationships, and scenes related to professional development when demonstrating psychodrama in the classroom. Some examples of these types of demonstrations might include psychodramas or sociodramas: expressing gratitude; connecting with a professional mentor, role-model, or historical figure; integrating strengths needed to be a successful professional; connecting with a future professional self; and role-training for common

situations related to internship or professional experiences. These themes establish a contract for the psychodrama which help keep the experience appropriate for the academic setting.

Limitations & Objectives

There are many limitations to teaching psychodrama in a university course context. Although the course may be focused on teaching psychodrama, it is not advisable that students attempt to begin directing psychodramas after completing one three credit semester course (30-45 classroom hours). While ongoing psychodrama training groups maintain the goal of teaching participants how to direct psychodramas, in most cases a university psychodrama course should not hold this as a goal (an exception to this would be an advanced psychodrama course that requires a prerequisite psychodrama course). Instead, university psychodrama course objectives might be oriented around teaching group dynamics, group therapy skills, pen-to-paper and experiential sociometry tools, psychodrama-like interventions (letter writing), basic psychodrama techniques (concretization, doubling, etc), Morenean history/philosophy, psychodrama/sociometry theory, role-training, sociodrama, and introducing students to psychodrama. This core difference in objectives needs to guide the structure of the psychodrama course content.

Considerations to Program Contexts and Course Formats

The degree program within which a psychodrama course is taught will impact students' learning dynamics. Students within psychology, counseling, social work, and marriage & family therapy degree programs likely are conditioned to lecture-based courses. These students may need more time to warm-up to experiential learning in each session. Students within expressive/creative arts therapy programs and drama therapy programs are likely more easily warmed-up to experiential learning structures in the classroom as their graduate program norms include more experiential education.

The format of a university psychodrama course will also impact the teaching process. A course that meets on a weekly basis for a few hours has the advantage of providing students with time/space to integrate pieces of learning over the length of a semester. However, a course with weekly sessions only lasting 2-3 hours limits the levels of safety, cohesion, and action that can take place each session. Some psychodrama courses are taught in intensive weekend formats which more closely resemble traditional psychodrama training workshops and allow for deeper levels of experiencing and immersion.

The recent change in ABE training guidelines to permit distance learning hours towards psychodrama certification may also increase the prevalence of online psychodrama university courses. An online course format would limit the effective and thorough teaching of psychodrama/sociometry content. In an online course students could effectively learn history, theory, philosophy, and be introduced to sociometry/psychodrama practice through experiential processes modified for online formats or watching recorded videos.

Content Vs Process

Psychodrama training traditionally marries content and process by using sociometry to teach sociometry and using psychodrama to teach psychodrama. In the psychodrama classroom, it is important to also use assigned readings, lecture, discussion, and written assignments as other processes to teach the content. In a course with content unrelated to Moreno's methods, sociometry and psychodrama can still be used as teaching processes. While the majority of this document addresses the question of best practices for teaching sociometry/psychodrama courses, it is important to also note that sociometry/psychodrama tools can be used to teach any other topic. Because sociometry and psychodrama are *process-oriented*, they can be used with any *content*. The professor can simply transfer course content that is traditionally taught didactically into experiential teaching processes.

Warming Up Students and the University

The process of becoming an adjunct professor can take many different routes. Some ways to begin to warm-up a university (and its students) to psychodrama include: offering guest lectures, teaching already established courses as an adjunct, offering workshops in their post-graduate training department, collaborating on research projects, and supervising students' internships. When proposing a new psychodrama elective at a university, it is important to adequately warm-up both the university program administration and the students. Without both warm-ups, the course will be rejected by the administration or unchosen by the students during registration.

Many professors schedule guest lecturers in their courses throughout the semester to diversify their students' learning experience or even to cover sessions that they will be absent from. An offer to guest lecture by a respected colleague is often welcomed. Most university departments also have a professional development office which accepts workshop proposals throughout the year for continuing education courses. These workshops are great opportunities to begin to build connections at your local university. In addition to CE courses, many programs also have a student union or student association that organizes events for students. Offering a free psychodrama event for current students is one of the best ways to warm-up a cohort for a psychodrama course. Because students are often required to be on curriculum committees for university programs, they have more power than one may think when it comes to establishing new electives.

Another way to warm-up students and faculty to psychodrama is to offer internships at your site. This allows students to see psychodrama practiced in action. Because many programs orient their core practice course discussions and assignments around field placement, a student interning at your site will be writing about and discussing psychodrama throughout the semester to their fellow students and professors. Full-time professors are required to publish on a regular basis. In many cases they are looking to collaborate on research projects or build community partnerships. Inviting a university professor to work together on developing a research project at your agency is a mutually beneficial project.

University programs often are seeking adjunct professors to teach already established courses within their programs. Securing an adjunct position this way allows one to use sociometry and psychodrama as teaching processes for another course and begin to warm-up the university for a full psychodrama course. Most programs already have an established group psychotherapy course which is a perfect course to begin integrating Moreno's methods.

Developing a Course Syllabus

The once students and a university are adequately warmed-up for a psychodrama course, a syllabus can be proposed to the administration. Developing a course syllabus is similar to a workshop proposal but also includes assigned readings and assignments for students. When creating a syllabus, it is important to frame it to fit within the larger program-as-a-whole. For example, if you are proposing a syllabus to a graduate social work program at a Christian university, it helps to include readings and assignments that integrate Moreno's methods within the field of social work and the religious philosophy of the school. As psychodramatist, we are taught to consider the group-as-a-whole, in this case the program-as-a-whole and the field of the degree must be considered. Considering academia's acceptance of group psychotherapy, it can also help to frame psychodrama within the larger group psychotherapy field. Although it is often not required for elective courses, it can help to demonstrate how the proposed psychodrama course fits within the required core competencies for the accreditation body of the degree program (CSWE, CACREP, COAMFTE, etc).

The ASGPP Professional Liaison Committee has collected several dozen psychodrama syllabi from around the world to be published on its website to support this initiative of further embedding psychodrama within American academia. The available syllabi offer a starting point or frame of reference to warm you up to developing your own course. The various syllabus formats, course structures, assigned readings, assignments, and topics provide a cultural conserve for the creation of your own syllabus.

From Psychodrama Trainer To Professor

The role transformation from psychodrama trainer to psychodrama professor is an essential transition for psychodramatists working in an academic setting. The following chart provides a visual representation of the role differentiation between psychodrama trainer and professor.

Role	<u>Psychodrama Trainer</u>	<u>Psychodrama Professor</u>
Setting	Private Institutes	Universities & Colleges; Classroom Setting Limits Physical Movement and Noise Levels
Participants	Primarily Practicing Professionals - Self- selected and likely to have	Graduate Students – usually unexperienced in psychodrama; some students may take course solely due to

	previous experience	scheduling or program requirements
Teaching Focus	Primarily Skills-Building and Personal Development	History, Theory, Philosophy, & Skills-Building
Teaching Methods	Primarily Experiential & Demonstrations	Lecture, Readings, Assignments, Discussion, & Experiential Demonstrations
Limitations	Financially Limiting to Many Professionals	Time-limited; Less Experienced Participants; Boundaries on Emotional Experiencing; Student's Shouldn't Direct Psychodramas After 1 Course
Emotional Norms	High Vulnerability & Emotional Thresholds	Low-Moderate Vulnerability and Emotional Thresholds
Objectives	Train Psychodramatists	Familiarize Students with Moreno's Methods; Train Students to Use Some Tools

Conclusion

Our hope is that these best practice guidelines and the database of psychodrama syllabi will provide support and direction for psychodrama trainers who wish to teach psychodrama in their local universities and colleges. These guidelines were developed primarily with a focus on teaching psychodrama/sociometry within American graduate programs in counseling, psychology, social work, marriage and family therapy, drama therapy, creative/expressive art therapies. Some of these guidelines may not be generalizable to other fields and/or international academic contexts.