

USING DRAMA IN THE HEALING PROCESS

This formed the basis of a workshop in the IAAH symposium in Vancouver. Peter Chown and Julia Tressider from Sydney contributed a story telling exercise which they have used with teenagers in Australia. The 'Youth Support' contribution consisted of a series of videotape segments illustrating an ascending level of psychodramatic intervention - role play ; using a 'story' (Cinderella) and changing the outcome; using a real situation and changing the outcome; 'Magic shop' ending. Many thanks to the young people who contributed even though unable to be in Vancouver themselves. Thanks also to Alistair and Leon for producing the 'Rapid Tour' video of Youth Support House. Which was shown at the start of the IRC workshop.

The nature of psychodrama

Psychodrama, according to J.L. Moreno, was born in the "Viennese cradle" in April 1921 as the "Theatre of spontaneity" (Moreno, 1946.) Moreno had experimented with group analysis in 1921 when he placed the group of couches in a circle and tried free association. This produced a disordered mix of individual associations which did not gel together. He believed that psychodrama was essentially a group process, and that the group and the individual are never really separable except by artificially ignoring the one or the other. (Davies, 1987). His idea was that psychodrama was, in some way, the antithesis of psychoanalysis and reported saying to Freud "You analyse their dreams, I give them courage to dream again. His ideas were going against the current flow of thought at that time, counter to the 'fear of neuroses' which he felt prevailed in Vienna. "After purging nature (Darwin) and society (Marx) from creative cosmic forces the final step was the purging of genius by psychoanalysis".

The Italian Comedy form "La Commedia Dell'Arte" provided Moreno with a model of a semi-spontaneous drama whereby the roles of Arlecchino, the Carabiniere etc. are fixed but

the dialogue is improvised. Moreno used roles to "enter the unconscious from the social world to bring shape and order into it". By allowing actor and later the general public to enact roles without a script their own subconscious world was brought to life on the stage.

Aristotle (c.350 B.C.) provided the model for catharsis in theatre "A tragedy is filled with incidents arousing pity and fear wherewith to accomplish catharsis of such emotions". Breuer used hypnosis to recall feelings from unconsciousness to produce a catharsis. In psychodrama, however, we see catharsis in action.

Using Drama with young people

The classic format for psychodramatic intervention involves use of warm up sessions during which the protagonist is chosen; a great deal of emphasis is then placed on this particular protagonist who undergoes an interview and contract forming as regards what he or she wishes to get out of the session; thereby setting the scene and moving from one scene into another. The scenes are generally linked by a theme and often the contact becomes more and more poignant and challenging as one moves from perhaps an initial low-impact, less

threatening general theme, to a highly threatening and very intense emotional scene during which a great deal of catharsis of emotions takes place. During this part of the psychodrama the members who are playing roles or doubling for the protagonist are very much expected to be a carte blanche on which the experiences and feelings of the protagonist can be painted; in other words - it is the protagonist who puts the words in her mouth and, with the help of the director organising the scene, all the emphasis is on the protagonist. The psychodrama may focus on this same person over the space of one or two hours, or even longer.

In working with young people it is often not possible to keep within the formal format. Very often some blurring occurs between the protagonist and the accessory ego, or people who are playing other roles. Many of the young people we work with have experienced similar backgrounds of abuse and deprivation, and it is thus very hard for somebody who is playing, say, the role of the protagonist's mother not to bring into this role aspects of her own mothering. This is something which is deliberately avoided by the Director in classic psychodrama, but something which we can work with when dealing with young people.

Similarly, with our particular drama group, it is often impossible to hone in on one group member for long periods of time. We also need to avoid some of these more intense cathartic moments that can be engineered in classic psychodrama. The depth of hurt and pain which can be brought out very quickly in some of our young people is too much

to be dealt with and contained within our kind of group.

In view of these features, drama work with abused and young people has to take a lighter level. We use a great deal of warm up sessions and games which help break the ice and help give young people confidence to be able to open their mouths and speak in company of others. Even a simple game such as I Spy to begin with has value. Other techniques to use involve role play in varying situations. As these people start on a fictitious level, i.e. a less threatening level, they then work towards an event that has actually happened either within the unit or in the patient's background. Fairy stories also form a fertile ground for psychodrama in that we can pretend that a character in a fairy story is our protagonist and work on their stories in parallel to our own.

Psychodrama is par excellence a group activity. Moreno was in fact the first exponent of group psychotherapy. Thus, although at first sight it might appear that the protagonist is playing out his or her situation alone, the group issues are extremely important and are seen to influence the choice of double accessory egos as well as the flow of the drama. Within a residential unit such as ours these features tend to come to the fore. Our clients live together, and re-enact group / family dynamics on a day-to-day basis. These can then be brought out within the drama.

Moreno is credited with the remark: "Don't tell me, show me". In the drama the protagonist is showing the group how he feels and relates to the world. The protagonist is bringing his or

her inner world onto the stage, and it is left to the rest of the group to pick up words, phrases and gestures of significance and amplify such points in directing the action. The transference and counter-transference issues come alive and form an integral part of the drama.

Young people who have been hurt, abused and deprived often have enormous problems in communication. Hence classic psychodynamic psychotherapy can be difficult in this group. Young people can be very creative and need different avenues in which to express their feelings and emotions. At Youth Support we use Art therapy, Movement therapy, Drama therapy and these different vehicles maybe more acceptable to one person than another, but do allow different ways of expression. The importance of drama is that we can play. Winnecott said that therapy occurs in the overlap of the play space between the therapist and the patient. This is particularly true with young

people. Deprived youths have often not been allowed to be children and to play - they have often had to be little adults in childhood and have not been allowed to enjoy themselves or express themselves. Playing can often be difficult but it is an extremely valuable tool in the healing process. Games such as the Magic Shop Workshop , with which we often finish a session, bring people very much into the child ego state; in other words, it helps to bring us into contact with our inner child which carries our hurt and pain, and which needs to be nurtured, contained and loved in the healing process.

References

- 1 Aristotle "De Poetica"
Aristotle and the Art of Poetry,
Bywater 1909
- 2 Breur & Freud, "Studies in
Hysteria" 1895
- 3 Davies M.H., "Drama Therapy
& Psychodrama in Drama Therapy"
Jennings Croome Hill 1987

Indonesia has many different attitudes to health and disease. The culture takes a lot of understanding as it is so different from the West. People are encouraged to have two children only; there are signs in the streets saying that two children is best. The religion influences the attitudes. There tends to be a passive acceptance of illness as sent by Allah. But the people live in the present, rather than being concerned about past or future. They are very happy people, always smiling, although they are very poor. Indonesians take great pride in their children and care for the family. If one person is in work he buys shoes etc. for parents, children, aunts, uncles and all the extended family.

People in dominant cultures probably do not tend to spend time and trouble in understanding nondominant cultures.

I didn't learn the language so there were many issues which I didn't get to grips with

(MAGGIE)