

Learning Through Psychodrama and Sociometry: Two University Experiences

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ABSTRACT. This article describes the use of action methods and sociometry in two distinct psychodrama courses at the University of Brasilia, Brazil. The psychodrama course as this university exposes the psychology student to the basic theoretical concepts of J. L. Moreno. The practical aspects of the course, however, are derived from the needs of the group. The four sessions outlined here deal with role playing the psychologist in professional situations, dramatizing a fairy tale, a successful but frustrated attempt to enact a living newspaper, and a group sociometry that included the verbalized repercussions on the groups' dynamics.

SINCE 1977, PSYCHODRAMA has been taught regularly at the University of Brasilia, Brazil. It is an optional 90-hour, 1-semester course offered to undergraduate students. The main goals of the course are to acquaint the students with psychodrama and sociometry, action methods, and role playing. In Brazil, the psychology degree qualifies the student to become a psychologist because it is a 5-year program, heavily weighted in psychology courses, including a practicum.

Report of Experience 1

In our first report, we describe a situation in which role playing was used to deal with the fears that students experience when they face the everyday situations that may occur in their future professional careers. The group was composed of 13 women and 5 men who still needed 1 or 2 semesters to finish their studies. This experience was an outgrowth of a discussion about halfway into the semester when students talked about their professional plans and options as they waited for class to begin. Once the whole group had assembled, the conversation persisted, and the instructor pro-

posed that they use action methods to explore these ideas further. The students split into small groups, according to their preferences in psychotherapy: private practice, working with hospitalized children, terminally ill patients and prisoners, market research, and school counseling. Once the students had warmed up verbally, the settings were prepared. We used the desks on the stage and acted out the different situations there. The group was divided into professionals and clients, and the "clients" were instructed (without the "psychologists' " knowledge) to imagine themselves as clients and to bring up unforeseen problems that might arise in the respective settings. The idea was to expose the psychologist to unexpected situations as a spontaneity test. The clients would later evaluate how the psychologists had fared.

Each performance was carefully observed. Laughter from the audience was inevitable at some points. The director rarely intervened, except to structure the settings. Each performance was convincing and, at the end, it was difficult to say which group was the most spontaneous.

The sharing phase was particularly enlightening. Many of the students' doubts were dealt with through the role playing. The situations that were the most touching to the students were those dealing with prisoners and terminally ill patients. Some students stated that they felt they would be unable to cope with some of the situations presented, mainly because of the emotional distress involved and not because of a lack of technical training. Most of the other students said that they felt comfortable in their roles and had confirmed their vocational choice. Some of the students said that they had been more attracted by a situation different from the one they had initially chosen. Most of them confessed that they felt more at ease and in better contact with the professional issues dealt with.

It was curious that none of the groups chose a situation in which a psychologist was doing something outside the field, such as working as a bank clerk or in a secretarial job. Approximately 90% of the psychology students who are graduated in Brazil do not go on to the profession of their choice for reasons related mainly to the financial pressures of the present economic situation. Many are obliged to take jobs for which they are over-qualified, just to make ends meet. It was evident, however, that, at least at an idealized level, this group did not seriously consider the latter options before the course was over.

Discussion

The clarification of the professional choice was one of the most important results of this experience. Students sometimes complained that the excess of options at the university made them feel confused; they did not

know exactly where to turn. The classroom simulation of the professional situation had enabled them to feel more confident with their professional choice, they said.

A direct result of this experience was the students' interest in dealing with the ethical issues involved in the situations that emerged. Themes such as the "power" of the psychologist and the temptation to do things just to keep clients in therapy were discussed in great detail.

At the end of the semester course, a group evaluation showed that the students rated this session as very significant. A proposal to offer this kind of role playing to all psychology students before they entered their last year of training is presently under study.

Report of Experience 2

The second experience occurred with university psychology students who were taking the same psychodrama course, this time under the direction of the second author. Three significant incidents stand out.

1. At the beginning of the semester, the director asked the students to think about the fairy tale that was most significant to them. The instructor then asked them to gather together and discuss their choices and settle on a group selection. The students acted out the story of the Ugly Duckling and then commented that it related to their feelings as students (ugly ducklings) who would soon enter the professional field and needed to become "swans."

2. A few classes later, the Living Newspaper was proposed. The daily paper was distributed to all, and the students mulled over the different articles. In the small groups, many interesting stories were discussed and students considered how these could be acted out. When the director asked for their final choice (it had to be a group consensus), everyone sat down and refused to act out any of the ideas that had been discussed. No dramatization took place, and the fact that no one was willing to dramatize became the theme of the discussion. It became clear that because no group could agree with the other groups' choice, they were unwilling to cooperate with the majority vote. This was related to the Brazilian political situation of the time: the transition from a dictatorship to a democracy, and the fact that students of this generation had spent most of their lives under dictatorial rule. Unaccustomed to democratic procedures, the minority turned tables, so to speak, on what they perceived as the majority vote. Submission to the desires of the majority was an unviable option, much as it seems to be in Brazilian politics. Just as citizens in the minority in Brazil do not submit to the majority because they do not see any possibility of access to changing the rules once they have been established, so these psychology students feared submission to the majority.

3. Later in the semester, the students voiced a request for therapeutic work. The director was unwilling to embark on psychotherapy with the students because this was a teaching setting and different rules applied. Instead, a class sociometry was proposed as a means of learning the technique while investigating students' interrelations.

Twenty-three students participated (22 women and 1 man). Rules were set down: Students could not miss class beyond that point. Acceptance of the criteria was unanimous because all submitted to them. Ample discussion was allowed for the choice of the action chosen: Whom would I choose to give a hug? It was also agreed that the action was to be performed at the end of the sociometry. All of the students were to be chosen by each student as to positive, negative, or indifferent choices. The results were tabulated according to Bustos (1979) and were returned to the students. All incongruencies, negative and indifferent mutualities, were to be worked through by using therapeutic confrontations. Pairs of students stood facing each other, explaining and clarifying their choices.

The results were dramatic. Many relationships were salvaged, mix-ups were cleared up, and problems were resolved. One student stated that it had restored to her the determination to succeed as a psychologist, a choice she had earlier given up. The group members generally agreed that such sociometries should be part of the regular curriculum at the university.

Conclusion

We hope that, by sharing our experiences, others might be encouraged to use psychodrama and sociometry in teaching situations with even more successful results.

REFERENCE

Bustos, D. (1979). *O teste sociometrico*. São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense.