

## BOOK REVIEW

*Rebels With a Cause: Working With Adolescents Using Action Techniques*, by Mario Cossa. 2005. London: Jessica Kingsley

In the foreword to this book, Zerka Moreno endorses the contents as a “very fine and complete guide to using action methods effectively and appropriately” (11). Well, who am I to argue with Zerka? She is absolutely correct. Mario Cossa is clearly a practitioner well versed in working with adolescents and in using action techniques, thus rendering him particularly qualified to offer this resource to the community.

As someone who works with adolescents myself, I laughed out loud when I read the following: “In running action groups for young people, it is almost foolhardy (although in some settings, perhaps unavoidable) to lead a group solo” (62). I felt an instant kinship with Cossa as someone who not only knew how difficult it is to run an adolescent action group by oneself but also as someone who has, no doubt, discovered that morsel of wisdom the hard way, as have I, in one or more of those unavoidable settings.

It has been my experience that practitioners either love working with adolescents or they hate it, generally based on whether or not they truly understand how teenagers work. Cossa not only understands how teenagers work, he celebrates and revels in the things that make adolescents an exciting and rewarding population with whom to work.

After many years of conducting his ACTING OUT program of expressive arts group therapy with training and performance opportunities in issue-oriented, audience-interactive improvisational theater, Cossa now distills his experiences and his knowledge down to a primer that practitioners can use to begin to understand adolescents’ unique needs and how action methods must be modified to work effectively with this population.

The book is as well organized as a psychodramatic session would be, starting with a warm-up that touches on philosophical and theoretical issues, moving into an action section that speaks of using different techniques at different stages of group development, and ending with a sharing section in which Cossa addresses how to adapt action methods to specific subpopulations within the realm of working with adolescents.

The entire book is written clearly and simply enough for beginning clinicians to understand, and it is my opinion that sophisticated laypeople would also find this material fairly accessible. The book, however, does appear to have been written for clinicians or paraprofessionals who already work with adolescents.

My only detracting comment is that it is somewhat unclear what people should do with this book. The information given about adolescents is outstanding but primarily for people who do not yet have a good understanding of how adolescents work. The information that is offered about action methods is also good but, again, somewhat primary, seemingly best suited to people with little experience with action methods.

In that case, I consider the best consumer for this book to be someone who is inexperienced with action methods and with working with adolescents and who is going to undertake adolescent action groups in the near future. I would caution that person about the foolhardy nature of trying to do such a thing on one's own. I suggest that anyone inexperienced in action methods and inexperienced in working with adolescents strongly consider working with a cotherapist.

I make that suggestion partly because of the damage one can do to clients when one does not know what one is doing. My strongest caveat goes to the person foolhardy enough to go into the lion's den of an adolescent group without the proper armament of competence and confidence. One is not safe there without it! This book is a fantastic guide for those about to start that adventure, but a coleader and supervision are also strongly recommended.

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