

Metaphors of the unspoken: the use of action methods in Restorative Justice training

Alexandra Stouraiti¹

Abstract:

The use of Psychodrama and Sociodrama adds to the Restorative Justice and conflict transformation training. Somatic experiential learning leads to personal development and, thus, to the development of skills for trauma-informed facilitation. In this paper, we unravel the logic behind the selection of action methods implemented in the online sessions for the Winter School of University of Padua, and describe this experiential approach, illustrating its effects and results.

Keywords: restorative justice training; psychodrama ; sociodrama ; action methods ; role training;

1. Introduction

Winter School “Transforming 21st-century conflicts - Tools for promoting secure, inclusive and innovative societies” was delivered online over a 6-day period in February 2022, and again in February 2023. As mentioned in the project’s description, the goal was to “introduce students to perspectives like Restorative Justice and conflict transformation, and to critical and innovative instruments for enhancing restorative, responsive and transformative approaches to interpersonal conflict”. In this regard, the Scientific Director of the project took a bold leap in his initiative to ask the author to incorporate experiential learning and action methods in the project – an innovative initiative on a European level.

Some would argue that experiential learning is not the same when conducted online – and we would actually agree with them. It is, of course, different to look at a screen, than to experience the circular space of the psychodramatic “stage” (Moreno Z. et al, 2000). Similar to a fireplace, when one experiences the fire online, they get to watch it and hear the sound of the burning wood, but

¹ *Lawyer, Mediator, Psychodramatist & Peacemaking Circles facilitator - PhD cand. in Social Work (University of West Attica, Athens, Greece). Alexandra is a former Eastern Mennonite University scholarship and R. Bosch fellowship recipient. She was an action-methods trainer in the national training program on RJ and VOM, as well as the Winter School of the University of Padua. She is a member of the European Forum for Restorative Justice and the Hellenic Psychodrama Association.*

when they experience it in person, smell and touch (feeling the heat) are also activated. However, covid pandemic brought the integration of Sociodrama and Psychodrama in online training into the spotlight (Giacomuzzi, 2020). Furthermore, Moreno, the father of Psychodrama and group work, was a true pioneer - it was in the 1930s that he suggested the use of then-existing technology, like audio and video recordings, to create healing experiences for larger groups of people (Moreno, 2014). Teledrama is the new term that refers to the use of action methods in an online video format (Simmons, 2018), that acts as “a bridge between countries and cultures”. The Greek word “tele” means “from afar”, but in a psychodramatic view was first used by Moreno to describe the two-way empathy, the mutual connection between people, including the one that occurs in a psychodramatic session. So, in a sense, in the Morenian language, every psychodramatic encounter, even when in person, may be considered as tele-drama (Giacomuzzi, 2021).

Action methods were used in both years that the Winter School took place. Our attempt in this paper is to holistically unfold the trail of thought that led us to choose the techniques and interventions that we did, as well as to present them in the most accurate and vivid way possible. The reasoning behind every choice must be analyzed and conceptualized, because psychodrama can definitely provide healing, but it can also cause harm if facilitated inadequately or not by a certified practitioner (Giacomuzzi, 2021 ; Dana, 2001). That said, we had a two-fold goal regarding our contribution to the Winter School: one, to provide the space and activities for the integration of as many conceptual and theoretical frameworks that had already been presented by other lecturers, as possible. Two, to facilitate activities that would contribute most to the development of the participants’ soft skills and self-awareness.

2. Inner landscape transformation, and conflict resolution

The use of psychodrama in Academia started early on, as Moreno himself incorporated it into the US higher education system beginning at Columbia University in 1937 (Moreno, 1955). However, almost a century later, psychodrama has not been utilizing its full potential in academic settings - unlike clusters of it, like role-play and dramatherapy (which emerged from psychodrama, but developed its own forms), that have been established in academic institutions (Stouraiti, 2021). According to Rogers (1961), there are two types of learning: cognitive, and experiential - and learning requires that we address the cognitive as well as the emotional function of the brain, as intellectualization coexists with emotionality (Fanning & Gaba, 2007). Admittedly, it is not appropriate to ask students or trainees who have come together for a week, to enter depths of vulnerability not suitable for a training setting, and there should be a balance between left-brain cognitive learning, and right-brain emotional learning (Giacomuzzi, 2021). Action methods were

used in the Winter School to enhance professionalism by supporting participants to enhance their inner awareness (Baile & Blatner, 2014), and translate theory into practice (Furman et al., 2009 ; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Moreover, there is an absolute need for the creation of a safe environment in the group, which is not necessarily the case in academic or training settings, even less in online ones. The creation of a safe space was our number one priority in the session, as feeling safe in the learning environment, as well as being able to reflect, have been accepted as key factors in learning (Knowles et al., 2005).

To comprehend the deeper meaning and usefulness of the integration of psychodramatic encounters in Restorative Justice training, it would be useful to attempt a parallelism of Restorative Justice and psychodrama, treating the former as the macro level, and the latter as the micro level. Varona (2020, as cited in Pointer & Pali, 2022) argues that a restorative process is “the art of creative thinking”, and “a means of crafting and experiencing the mysterious art of doing justice”. Moreno (1987), on the other hand, emphasized the importance of high creativity and spontaneity in an individual. Spontaneity is the ability to respond to a situation or address a problem in a creative way (Blatner & Cukier, 2007 ; Schacht, 2007). Psychodrama itself is a role training in creativity and spontaneity. And although the words “creativity” and “spontaneity” may feel light and happy, in a setting of an existing conflict, a disruption of the relational fiber, or a committed crime, it is certainly harder for the facilitator to sustain their openness. Peacebuilding and conflict transformation are not about the implementation of a set of techniques, but about generating processes that are rooted in violence, and yet transcend it – in other words, it’s about the “moral imagination” (Lederach, 2005) - same as in psychodrama, role creation is transcendence, the transformation of an old role into something new (Clayton, 1993). Lederach’s four pillars of moral imagination - the centrality of relationships, the paradoxical curiosity, the provision of a safe space for creativity to occur, and the willingness to take a risk – all of them can be recognized insight a psychodramatic session. However, we need to make sure that the restorative “ethos” is at the heart of the implemented techniques and interventions for the training session to be considered successful.

As we have previously extensively presented, role theory and role training are central in the use of psychodrama in training settings (Stouraiti, 2021). According to Clayton (1993), the “role” in psychodrama is considered “the functioning form of human behavior in relation to other people and/or objects, in specific times and situations”, while role training aims to the development of a specific aspect of human functioning. Neuroscience has proven that human brain resembles a society: we have multiple selves who don’t necessarily interact with one another (Gazzaniga, 1985). Moreover, according to Internal Family Systems Therapy - which has integrated Moreno’s methods in the family therapy field (Schwartz & Sweezy, 2019 ; Compennolle, 1981) - these parts of the self are not just a temporary emotional state, but each one has its own story, its own needs and

wants, and its own worldview (Schwartz, 1995). In psychodrama, we accept that roles exist prior to the self – or, in Moreno’s words, “roles do not emerge from the self, but the self emerges from roles (Moreno, 1953). In other words, roles are the vehicle from which the self is expressed both in psychodrama and in life (Giacomuzzi, 2021). In this regard, in psychodrama my “self” is my relational world. The relationship is central to psychodrama, as well as to Restorative Justice. Similar to societies (macro level) being held together by the invisible web of relationships (Lederach, 2005), the roles are held together by the self (micro level). The more able I am to relate to all my roles and resolve the inner conflicts that occur, the more able I am to contribute to a conflict transformation on the macro level.

In psychodrama, life situations and conflicts are explored by enacting them, rather than talking about them (Blatner, 1998). And, with the enactment and re-enactment during a role-training, the inner world becomes three-dimensional. Van der Kolk, in his best-seller “The body keeps the Score” (2014), dedicates a whole chapter to somatic, “three-dimensional” therapies that use terms like “protagonist” and “witness” (the psychodramatic “double”), utilize group members and/or objects to represent the Other (the psychodramatic “auxiliarie egos”), and create a dream-state in which multiple realities, past and present, co-exist (the “surplus reality” of Moreno) (Moreno, 1947 ; Moreno Z. et al., 2000), finding that they are very helpful to resolving trauma. Restorative Justice sees crime as an experience – and often this experience involves trauma. The facilitator needs to be able to witness what the experience means to the person involved, to understand its impact on them, and also be able to tolerate what comes up during a restorative encounter. Psychodrama can support the learners to adequately respond to situations where “a significant emotional component” is involved (Baile & Blatner, 2014). According to Yaniv (2012), psychodramatic techniques and interventions support the participants in learning to “tolerate the unknown and the unformulated, as one cannot know what the next moment will bring and just how much this new experience will clash with one’s own preconceptions”.

3. Sociometry, psychodrama, and experiential learning

In psychodrama, after each session, the director writes a Report that consists of three parts: the description of the session, the roles that arose during the session in all the group members, and the director’s evaluation of their way of function - meaning, analysis of their own roles. For the sake of this paper, we are presenting a short version of merging the first and second part of our Report for both years that the Winter School took place, having added relevant references. The order that is presented follows the order in which the three essential phases of a psychodramatic session occur: warm-up, enactment, sharing, and processing (Yablonsky, 1981). The reader should, however,

keep in mind that the implementation of action methods did not take place in exactly the same way in both years. One reason for that was that never are two groups' dynamics similar. Secondly, there was a rearrangement in the schedule, as the first time we had a two-hour session on the fifth day of the program, while in the second we had an opening, one-hour session on the first day, and another one-and-a-half-hour on the third day. Moreover, the director participated in the whole program during its implementation in the first year, as a director must maintain awareness of the sociometry in a group (Gershoni, 2016) – which was not possible during the second year due to other commitments. Last, but not least, there was a very challenging difference, as during the first Winter School of 2022 the war between Russia and Ukraine burst, and there were people from both countries participating in the group - so, a conflict-transformation psychodramatic workshop was, indeed, a challenge.

Warm-up:

Warm-up is the heart of psychodrama. According to Moreno, there is not such a thing as a failed psychodramatic session, there is just not sufficient warm-up (Giacomuzzi, 2021). The director seeks to understand the area of human experience the group is interested in, and take into consideration the motivating and reactive forces that are present in the participants in the here and now (Clayton, 1992). For this reason, a substantial amount of time was dedicated to the group's warm-up. After introducing myself as the director (even though the group already knew who I was), I asked the group to define the temperature of the group on a scale from 1 to 10 – meaning, each person mentions their state (concentration, feelings, awareness, etc.), and emphasize the statement that I wouldn't be presenting things *to* the group, but creating along *with* the group. This generated interest and curiosity, which led to genuine engagement. The session started with a group-centered discussion on the qualities of a good enough Restorative Justice facilitator. The instruction was to choose a word (e.g. "warmth"), and explain it in one sentence ("warmth is to be able to connect, speak from the heart, create rapport", etc). The participants were invited to not raise hands, but respectfully turn their microphone on and speak, which aimed to support the participants in developing accountability about their choice of when and how to speak, as well as an active presence in the group.

Enactment: role-creation and role-training:

Psychodrama aims to the expansion of one's "role repertoire" (Moreno, 1946). In role training, the focus is on one aspect of the self, not on the reorganization of the whole personality, as the modification of one aspect will affect the function of the whole (Clayton, 1993). Due to the limited duration of the session, the director presented the concept that for the transformation of any conflict, four aspects are necessary – meaning, four different "roles": Truth, Mercy, Justice, and Peace. I asked the participants to imagine these roles as siblings and divided the group randomly

into four subgroups by creating four breakout rooms in the online platform. Each subgroup was given one of the roles above to bring to life: the participants were to collectively decide the role's age, sex, elements of character, as well as the ways that this role is connected to the other members of the family. Each subgroup ought to also decide who was going to present the role to the plenary – so, sociometry was also used in the session. Then, it was time for the enactment. Peace, Justice, Mercy, and Truth were present. Maybe their perceptions agreed on who was older or fond of whom, maybe not. This element of unpredictability created open space for creativity and spontaneity to expand in the group (Yaniv, 2012). Each role expressed itself regarding needs, wants, relationships, challenges, and coping mechanisms, as conflicts also arose between them. From one point onwards there was also the instruction that any member of the particular subgroup could intervene in their group's role presentation by saying "Freeze" and entering the "stage" (Boal, 1985).

Sharing and processing:

During the very important phase of sharing, the protagonist is integrated back into the group, and the other group members express all the ways they related to the enactment (Dayton, 2005) – so the group reveals itself, just like the protagonists have already revealed themselves during the enactment (Nolte, 2014). Emotion, body, and intellect need to be in balance for learning to occur (Fanning & Gaba, 2007 ; Van der Kolk, 2014), so, after a first round of sharing, the director decided to use the Johari Window as a tool to further support the phases of sharing and processing. The Johari Window is a model first presented by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham (the word "Johari" actually being a combination of their first names) back in 1955, that represents the Self as a window with four quadrants: the Arena (aspects of the self that are known to me, as well as to others), the Façade (aspects known to me, but unknown to others – the "mask"), the Blind Spot (known to others, but unknown to me), and, finally, the Unknown (aspect that not me, nor others know about – the unconscious). Important realizations occurred from the participants about their selves in this phase, and the levels of curiosity remained high. Finally, the processing phase of a psychodrama (training) session came up organically. Processing is about analyzing, evaluating, and understanding the session "in a less subjective way" (Jefferies, 2002) - in other words, processing aims to the connection with theory (Kellermann, 1992), in this particular case with the conflict transformation and Restorative Justice theory that the group had already been introduced to by the other lecturers in the previous days. A closing circle of sharing final thoughts and feelings concluded our session.

4. Concluding remarks - The verdict is (with)in

Action methods contribute to the development of skills and attributes of a trauma-informed practitioner of Restorative Justice, while they can also be applied to solidify the knowledge of the necessary conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Psychodrama can act as the “bridge” between knowing and practicing Restorative Justice. The primary goal of the action methods session of the Winter School was to contribute to the fostering of a dialogue between the field of Restorative Justice and conflict transformation on one hand, and psychodrama and sociometry on the other. The innovative initiative of the University of Padua’s Winter School, can be considered a success: the compound of theory and practice of Restorative Justice is best achieved by the implementation of psychodrama in parallel with lectures and presentations within academic settings, for the participants to be able to tolerate the paradox and remain open to face the unknown. Intellectual excellence may be required in Academia, but inner “expansion” is essential to be able to hold space for people to experience the intensity of a restorative process and to face the paradox. Anything less may fall under the umbrella term “Restorative Justice” or “conflict transformation”, but wouldn’t create the same catharsis.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Professor Federico Reggio, for offering her the chance to lecture for the Winter School of 2022 and 2023. The author would also like to thank the University of West Attica who kindly supported the publication of this paper through the “Special Account for Research Grants” (ELKE).

References

- Baile W. & Blatner A. (2014), Teaching Communication Skills – Using action methods to enhance role-play in problem-based learning, *Society for Simulation in Healthcare*, 9(4)
- Blatner, A. (1998), *Foundations of psychodrama: history, theory and practice* (3rd edition), New York: Springer Publishing Company
- Blatner, A., & Blatner, A., (1988), *Foundations of Psychodrama*, New York: Springer
- Blatner, A. & Cukier R. (2007), 'Moreno's Basic Concepts', in Clark B., Burmeister J. & Maciel M. (Eds), *Psychodrama: Advances in Theory and Practice*, New York: Routledge
- Boal, A., (1985), *Theater of the Oppressed*, Theatre Communications Group
- Clayton, G.M., (1992), *Enhancing life & relationships: a role training manual*, Melbourne: ICA Press
- Clayton M. (1993), *Living pictures of the self: applications of role theory in professional practice and daily living*, Caulfield: ICA Press
- Compernelle T. (1981), J.L. Moreno: An unrecognized pioneer of family therapy, *Family Process*, 20(3), 331-335
- Dana K. C. (2001), Psychodrama and the Training of Trial lawyers: Finding the story, *N. Ill. UL Rev.*, 21(1).
- Dayton, T., (2005), *The Living Stage: a step-by-step guide to Psychodrama, Sociometry, and experiential group therapy*, Florida: Health Communications Inc.
- Fanning R.M., & Gaba D.M., (2007), The role of debriefing in simulation-based learning, *Simul Healthc*, 115-125
- Furman, R., Rowan, D., & Bender, K., (2009), *An experiential approach to group work*, Chicago: Lyceum Books
- Gazzaniga, M.S., (1985), *The Social Brain: Discovering the networks of the mind*, New York: Basic Books
- Gershoni, J., (2016), Highlighting Sociometry in the Psychodramatic Process, *Zeitschrift Fur Psychodrama und Soziometrie*, 15, 353-357
- Giacomuzzi, S. (2020), The Sociodrama of Coronavirus and Humanity through TeleTherapy, *The Group Psychologist*, 31(2)
- Giacomuzzi, S. (2021), *Social Work, Sociometry, and Psychodrama*, Singapore: Springer
- Jefferies, J. (2002), 'The Processing', in Karp M., Holmes P. and Tauvon K.B. (Eds). *To Ψυχόδραμα, θεωρία και πρακτική* [The Handbook of Psychodrama], Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, pp. 257-272
- Kellermann, P.F. (1992), *Focus on Psychodrama*, London: Jessica Kingsley

Rivista su trasformazione dei conflitti, cultura della riparazione e mediazione
Journal on Conflict Transformation, restorative Culture and Mediation

- Knowles M.S., Holton E.F. & Swanson R.A. (2005), *The Adult Learner: the definitive classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 6th ed., Burlington: Elsevier
- Lederach, J.P., (2005), *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Luft, J., & Ingham, H., (1955), *The Johari window, a graphic model of interpersonal awareness, Proceedings of the western training laboratory in group development*, Los Angeles: University of California
- Moreno, J.L., (2014), *Impromptu Man: J.L. Moreno and the Origins of Psychodrama, Encounter Culture, and the Social Network*, New York: Bellevue House Press
- Moreno, J.L., (1987), *The Essential Moreno: Writings on Psychodrama, Group Method, and Spontaneity*, Fox, J. (Ed.), New York: Springer
- Moreno, J.L., (1955), *Preludes to my autobiography*, New York: Beacon House
- Moreno, J.L., (1953), *Who shall survive? Foundations of Sociometry, Group Psychotherapy and Sociodrama*, New York: Beacon House
- Moreno, J.L., (1952), *Psychodramatic Production Techniques, Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama, and Sociometry*, 4, 273-303
- Moreno, J. L., (1946), *Psychodrama, first Vol.* New York: Beacon House
- Moreno, Z., Dag Blomkvist, L., and Rutzel, T. (2000), *Psychodrama, Surplus Reality, and the Art of Healing*, London: Routledge
- Nolte, J., (2014), *The Philosophy, Theory, and Methods of J.L. Moreno: The Man Who Tried to Become God*, New York: Routledge
- Nolte, J. (2020), *J.L Moreno and the psychodramatic Method: On the practice of psychodrama*, New York: Routledge
- Pointer, L. & Pali, B. (2022), *Advancing Restorative Justice through Art, The International Journal of Restorative Justice*, 5(3)
- Rogers, C. (1961), *On becoming a person: A therapist's view on psychotherapy*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin
- Schacht, M. (2007), *Spontaneity-creativity: the psychodramatic concept of change*, in Clark B., Burmeister J. & Maciel M. (Eds), *Psychodrama: Advances in Theory and Practice*, New York: Routledge
- Schwartz, R.C., & Sweezy, M. (2019), *Internal Family Systems Therapy*, New York: Guilford Publications.
- Simmons, D. (2018), *Teledrama*, www.teledrama.org [last accessed 26/11/2023]
- Stouraiti, A. (2021), *The use of Psychodrama in mediation training, Mediares Rivista*, 19(1)
- Schwartz, R. (1995), *Internal Family Systems Therapy*, New York: Guilford Press

Rivista su trasformazione dei conflitti, cultura della riparazione e mediazione
Journal on Conflict Transformation, restorative Culture and Mediation

- Van der Kolk, B.A. (2014), *The Body Keeps the Score – brain, mind and body in the healing of trauma*, New York: Penguin Books
- Yablonsky L. (1981), *Psychodrama: Resolving Emotional Problems through Role-playing*, New York: Gardner
- Yalom, I.D., & Leszcz, M., (2005), *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* (5th ed.), New York: Basic Books
- Yaniv D. (2012), Dynamics of creativity and empathy in role-reversal: Contributions from Neuroscience, *Review of General Psychology*, 16(1)