

## PSYCHODRAMA AS A TOOL FOR GROUP DIAGNOSIS

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In our country today there is an enormous waste of human energy, resources, and talent. Great numbers of our people, the vast majority of whom have been born into poverty, do not fulfill their potential in ways useful to themselves and to society. . . . Our public schools, as mirrors of our society, have played a significant role in creating the conditions that have led to the waste of talent and ability and to the subsequent loss of dignity and self-worth on the part of millions of our citizens.<sup>1</sup>

It is about the above educability gap that I direct the following article.

Recently, I had the opportunity to give a demonstration session of psychodrama for a group of seventy college-age youth at a national leadership training institute in Northern England. The training institute not only mirrored aspects of English society but was a great hallway of reflectors in that it purported to teach leaders how to lead and how to teach other leaders and so on. As potential societal mirrors, these students, and many like them, have an overwhelming responsibility to fulfill. In view of this, I reflect on a uniquely schizoid experience spent with the group; an evening of psychodrama which was a dichotomous success and failure. Consideration of these extremes, each speaking to the other, caused me to look at the relationship of group performance and the leadership abilities of the participants. Before giving my own subjective impression of one experience, I would like to spotlight related studies by Kahn and Katz<sup>2</sup> investigating the relationship between leadership and group performance. In essence, the findings were as follows:

1. Supervisors of more effective groups were better able to play a differentiated role than the supervisors of the less effective groups.
2. The better supervisors delegated authority to others more than the poorer supervisors.
3. The more effective supervisors were more supportive in their relationships with their subordinates and gave more attention to creating motivation.
4. The supervisors of the more effective groups had work groups which had developed greater cohesiveness among members of the group than those groups which were doing a less effective job.<sup>3</sup>

Learning to observe oneself in interpersonal behavior is a difficult task. It is necessary to do so in order to effectively carry out the above findings.

## GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY

It was my impression, corroborated by reports from the students, that these leaders-in-training who participated in the demonstration had not, heretofore, had the opportunity to sufficiently assess and refine their behavior as participants or as leaders. The psychodrama session began to provide that opportunity of intimate emotional exchange and both intra- and interpersonal exploration. On this level of demonstrative involvement, the session was a success. Some students said that they learned more in one evening than in the totality of courses offered. The resounding failure looms its head in the fact that the educability "gap" was revealed to be a chasm. It became obvious from the session that the leaders had not led, had not been led, had sparse conception of the role of group leader or group member and had little or no feeling of either role. The revealed "gap" and the "revealer", being the psychodrama session itself, both subject themselves to statements of John Rich in *Education and Human Values*.<sup>4</sup>

Informal groups develop more or less spontaneously to fulfill social needs that remain unfulfilled by management practices. Management, fearing that informal groups may divert or subvert operations within the organization, may apply pressure to keep the groups under administrative control. However, the informal groups strengthen themselves to resist the pressure, and if more pressure is then applied, they tend to become even stronger . . .

Recognizably, the above situation occurs in organizational settings and well might have occurred had we continued the psychodramas—perhaps not.

There are many questions that arise as a result of the gap. What had these students *not* been learning? Why should a group, at the end of their training in group dynamics and leadership be unsophisticated in group participation and, themselves, admit to being unastute observers? Is it possible to reduce the unpreparedness of group leaders by close observation of their own behavior toward each other? The answer would seem to be a simple, yes. Yes, is too simple, however, to rectify the situation for those of us involved in the essence of human communication. I offer a closer look at observational tools or measuring sticks that may help to diagnose a kind of group pathology; a closer look at a group's facility of participating, in an effort to take the temperature of the skill level of the leaders-in-training.

Consider the following in relation to a psychodrama session:

**Attendance:** Far in advance, both faculty and students were invited to attend a demonstration of a methodology relatively new to them, psychodrama. Attendance was voluntary. Roughly 70-80% of the students came. None of the faculty attended.

**Seating:** The room was arranged with a semi-circle of chairs facing a stage area. Most of the leaders-in-training chose seats in the back rows, brought in more seats and added them to the back rows and left the front rows empty. Was it the director's behavior or the behavior of the group members? Upon entering the room, none of the members walked across the stage area except one who

## PSYCHODRAMA

sat on the chair on the stage (that is, a designated part of the room left clear, not a raised level) and pantomimed playing a tom-tom drum. The group laughed and called him derogatory names. He strode across the stage to his seat in an indecisive, sheepishly defiant manner.

*Initial sound level and physical appearances:* Much laughter, poking and anxious chatter was observed. Many people had their legs crossed and arms folded. The leaders-in-training looked physically uncomfortable. Were they fearful of the unknown? Were they anxious about participating with their classmates, or was, simply, the anticipation of group involvement the producer of dis-ease?

*Manner of participation in the warm-ups:* It is said by Moreno that spontaneity begets spontaneity. Give and ye shall receive. I believe it can also be said that in the early stages of a group experience, hostility begets hostility and gentility begets gentility. In these particular warm-ups, tremendous physical aggression was shown by the group which included two nuns in habit. At one point, and resulting from a discussion, two circles were formed. In each, participants locked arms and formed human traps which individual members tried to get into or to get out. (This technique was originally developed by Hannah Weiner.) Two circles were also formed to allow a member, standing in the middle, to lean back and he was supported and/or lifted by the strength of the circle. This technique is often used to measure or develop group trust. In these particular circles, a curious behavioral repetition occurred. The member being supported was more often dropped on the floor than not, or experienced fear in trying to let himself be supported. There was much giggling and physical aggression shown here, as well as a unique lack of cohesiveness and cooperation in the expenditure of energy to support the group member. This also occurred when the group joined together as a whole.

In J. L. Moreno's first book, *The Words of the Father*<sup>5</sup>, he reverses roles with God and speaks:

"Remember, this is Satan's law—Kill your neighbor before he kills you; be the first to kill.

"This is my law—Love your neighbor before he loves you; be the first to love."

Wearing the discomfort of participating one with the other, the leaders-in-training seemed to have yet another law: Reject your neighbor before he rejects you; be the first to reject.

A high point of the entire session was the following: five volunteers were asked to come onto the stage area, to express anything they felt to each other or to the rest of the group and to use the room and furniture in any way they chose. They were asked not to use words but they could use sounds. In this warm-up, often a leader emerges, dyads and triads develop and frequently the behavior becomes creative and meaningful. Fifteen to twenty people may become involved, experiencing a variety of emotions from fear to anger to affection,

## GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY

etc. The group of leaders-in-training, after fifteen minutes, were asked to discuss what they saw and felt. Most denied feeling anything much or had difficulty putting it into words but said they "enjoyed it." The on-lookers discussed such things as, "Sam took a chair and gave it to Joe." "Joe didn't want it." "Susan put her hand on Joe's shoulder and looked strange." Many peripheral observations were made with little depth of feeling or thought as to why the action occurred. There was almost no mention of emotional response. Later the director asked, "Did a leader emerge?" No one knew, but . . . they began to think about it. Several opinions were offered as to who was the leader, but no thoughts as to the type of leadership, or the relationships of the participants to him, was mentioned. Sociometric choices or rejections of the sub-groups were not observed by the group when questioned, but . . . they began to think about them. The fact that the leaders-in-training noticed very little about leadership, followingship or about their own participation became increasingly glaring to us all. We had an encounter with the absence of wisdom, ". . . eye to eye, face to face . . ." (J. L. Moreno).

*Spectator comments and participation:* Spectator involvement and catharsis evolves in a variety of ways both silently and verbally in a group. The leaders-in-training, though "involved" in the action, periodically heckled both the protagonist and the auxiliary egos much like the unusual baseball team, not caring about the best efforts of its most competent and sweating batter. The director used anxious hecklers as doubles or auxiliary egos but a unique disrespect for sociometrically rejected participants was noted. It was as though the participants wanted each other to only exist negatively or, easier yet, not to exist at all. Had the leadership institute become a meaningless social machine?

In his chapter on Technocracy and Dehumanization, Yablonsky writes:

People 'involved' with and subjugated by social machines tend to have a sense of personal disassociation from human groups and their society. They tend to feel disaffiliated and apart. In brief, they have a sense of alienation.<sup>6</sup>

After the action portion of the session, there was a touching reversal of respect shown for the participants. However, during the session, there seemed to be a need to be involved by verbalizing a denial of involvement. The tolerance level of member for member was often at a low ebb. I do not believe that this was due to disinterest in the content, as clues of disinterest such as walking out, unrelated talking, shuffling about, bored and sleepy faces become quickly evident. This did not occur but rather an undivided, respectless attention prevailed, traceable in the minority, though enough to feel the intensity of its disturbance.

*Desire to share and ease of sharing personal experience with the protagonist:* The sharing portion can often be a barometer of emotional temperature felt in individual group members as a result of the psychodramatic session. The depth of involvement may be shown in a verbal or non-verbal way; each may

## PSYCHODRAMA

have varying degrees of meaningfulness to group members depending on the *tele* developed by each for the other. The leaders-in-training had great willingness to share. The newness of this experience for many group members was striking to me and to them. There was beauty in faces startled by their own words, and by their own non-words.

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