RUNNING HEAD: SOCIODRAMA: OWNING REALISTIC FICTION

Sociodrama: Owning Realistic Fiction

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**Introduction**

Sociodrama is a means for communication in investigation of society. For some, being able to use sociodrama to express oneself in the classroom or the workplace allows them to be in their comfort zone when discussing ideas and feelings. For learners, sociodrama allows for real-life connections to link to subject matter, making it easier for some to understand difficult concepts and also to make learning fun and meaningful. When taking part in sociodrama, one tries out roles and ideas to see what may work for them in their real life, in the future.

**The History of Sociodrama**

Jocob Moreno is the founder of sociodrama. According to Eckloff (2006), the reason Moreno created sociodrama was “in response to the upheaval and horror of World War I” (p.259). Moreno (1953) defined sociodrama “as a deep action method dealing with group relations” (p.87 in Eckloff, 2006, p. 260). Moreno is the creator of both psychodrama and sociodrama. The two differ in that psychodrama is often related to one’s personal problems, whereas sociodrama is related to the problems of a group.

The roots of psychodrama and sociodrama lie in Moreno’s sociometric theory. According to Moreno (1955), “the aim of sociometry is to help the formation of a world in which every individual, whatever his intelligence, race, creed, religion or ideological affiliations, is given an equal opportunity to survive and to apply his spontaneity and creativity within it” (p.19). Within his theory Moreno outlines a democratic standpoint, where anyone can participate and be a part of society. In the face of war and strife, Moreno created sociodrama so that groups of people could cope with loss and develop and develop answers for a more positive future.

Some researchers have criticized Moreno’s work by saying that Kurt Lewin is the actual creator of the sociometric theory. In response to the criticism, Moreno wrote an article defending his research and theory. He stated, “in the case of duplicity of ideas the carriers do not know one another, they work in different places. But the imitators sit near the one from whom they steal the eggs, they are parasites. I did not harbor ill feelings towards them, this is the reason why I remained silent” (p.102). In regards to the beliefs of this paper, although the works of Moreno and Lewin appear to be quite similar, Moreno’s sociometric theory is his own.

**How Sociodrama Works / Application**

***The Problem***

Sociodrama is used to look into and experience the future. When a group of individuals meet to implicate sociodrama, the stage of a possible future experience is set and a future problem is ready to be explored. The problem at hand is one that benefits the entire group involved. As an example, students in a sixth grade classroom would concentrate more on a bullying problem rather than the problem of what to eat for lunch. Figuring out what to eat for lunch is the problem of one person, and may be figured out without using sociodrama. Solving the issue of bullying in the classroom is a problem that most likely affects the entire class. The bullying problem then evolves into a theme for the scene. There are no plots or scripts created before hand; lines and actions are improvised.

***The Stage***

When creating a space for sociodrama to take place, a comforting and open place should be created. Individuals participating in sociodrama should feel comfortable to be able to express themselves. Pecaski McLennan (2006) outlined the importance of a safe environment for children when she said, “a safe and comfortable space is essential if educators are to use sociodrama to encourage caring and nurturing interactions between students” (p. 454). There should be compassion and understanding evident in the participants and director of the group to allow for a sense of emotional freedom in the students.

There should be no physical limitations on the sociodrama stage. Individuals participating should be able to move around as they need, therefore, the larger the room the better. Props can be used to signify roles within the physical space. For example, Eckloff (2006) stated that “sometimes a role can be held b a chair, so that whoever sits in the designated chair takes on that role temporarily” (p.266).

***The Director***

In most cases, the role of the director is to act as a facilitator for the actors and audience (sometimes there are two people, one for each role). The director leads drama analyzing techniques such as freezing the scene and character shielding (Telesco, 2006). Freezing the scene allows for the director and audience to talk about the scene as if the actors are not present. Character shielding freezes all actors except one, which allows that actor to tell the audience more about themselves and how they feel about the scene.

When preparing for a sociodrama, Telesco (2006) suggested that directors meet with the actors beforehand to discuss the scene. Directors must know the roles before the scene takes place in order to facilitate the sociodrama most effectively.

***Characters***

Before the scene begins participants should take some time to discuss and develop the scene and character roles. The audience can ask questions to better clarify and give meaning to the scene (Eckloff, 2006). In terms of the past example of a sociodrama scene about bullying, students will want to ask questions like: Who is involved? Where does bullying mostly take place? How does bullying make the bully feel? How does bullying make the victim feel? Asking questions like those mentioned above help actors to gain a clearer definition of who their character is and how to feel.

Characters do not necessarily need to be living human beings. A sociodrama scene may be used to discover how a fire truck feels when seeing so much despair and loss through the fires it has seen. Characters may also be humans that have already passed on or not yet born. A sociodrama scene may be played to discover the effects of abortion on a fetus. Blatner (2006) stated that, “in a sociodrama about abortion, the fetus may be given a voice, using the principle of surplus reality. This reflects the way the mind works: while someone who is dead or not yet born does not have a voice, those voices are imagined, and heard inside our minds. In that sense, psychological truth is expressed” (p. 32). Actors must work hard to get to a deep level of thinking when attempting to act out such complex roles like the unborn.

A strategy used to allow for more input and feeling within a character is doubling. Doubling allows for participants to reach a character’s inner most feelings and may also “disclose the kinds of issues that are not generally admitted in ordinary discourse” (Blatner, 2006, p. 32). Blatner mentioned five levels of a character’s thoughts that participants can explore: open statements, inner voice, subconscious / preconscious, unconscious, and psycho-sociocultural level (2006). All levels are important to explore, but the fourth and fifth levels of thoughts is when the deep learning, understanding, and empathy for others grow.

***De-roling***

While acting in a scene, actors are to stay in character for every second. Not until the de-roling process takes place should an actor step out of the realm of their character (Telesco, 2006). When de-briefing, actors have the opportunity to talk about what it felt like to be in their character’s shoes and situation.

**What Sociodrama is Worth**

Within a classroom, sociodrama can be used to delve into issues like bullying, divorce, and friendship. Students can develop empathy for others by “stepping into another’s shoes.” McCaslin (2006) stated that when developing characters and roles, students may benefit from researching “readings and interviews of role models in the community” (p.287).

For children that are mildly emotionally or behaviorally disturbed, sociodrama can be very beneficial. These children may learn about how their behaviors affect others. In terms of seriously disturbed children, however, sociodrama may not be a positive behavior management technique. McCaslin (2006) noted that “children who are seriously disturbed need to make sense out of their own environment before they can enter another; moreover, until they know who they are, they will have difficulty being someone else” (p.287).

Sociodrama can benefit many businesses. In terms of public relations, businesses can use sociodrama routines in order for personnel to communicate more effectively throughout all departments of their company (Mickey, 1995). Workers may feel more apt to discuss their feelings about their company when using sociodrama in meetings.

Police officers also benefit from trainings involving sociodrama. By learning about what the culprit may be feeling, the officer may be more knowledgeable in catching the person.

**Research on Sociodrama**

Multiple case studies have been done involving analyzing sociodrama and the effect it has on groups of people. Moreno and Borgotta (1951) did an experimental sociodrama session bringing together “a number of persons working in various branches of industry who had special interest in dealing with industrial problems” (p.74). They did interviews with the sample to compare how interviews for solving problems differed from sociometric approaches for solving problems. From this experimental session, Moreno and Borgotta (1951) noted that although ideas generated from a sociometric approach were well-formed and more efficient than interviews, a weakness in the sociodrama approach used was that the director/facilitator was the same person. They believed that this led to biased results and findings.

Mickey (1995) highlighted a case study done within the Disney World theme park. Deede Sharp and Sue Rye were looking to train the employees to “make sure our guests have an enjoyable experience” and realize that although cleaning poop up is not fun, it is “it’s an important job and one that is respected and appreciated” (p. 88). They used sociodrama to incorporate a comfortable language within the business. Mickey noted that employees are cast members, management and employees together are a culture, and customers are their guests (1995). By creating these metaphors, Deede Sharp and Sue Rye felt that “a drama in which both the management/employees and guests play certain roles so that the Disney culture can continue to exist and entertain” (Mickey, 1995, p. 89).

**Conclusion**

Sociodrama is a powerful way for a group of people to investigate issues in society. There are many benefits of how sociodrama helps people relate and communicate to others. As the advantages in the case studies show, sociodrama will undoubtedly continue to be used in classrooms and in the workplace to help groups of people investigate and communicate their feelings about society.

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