

The art of healing: Book review of 'J.L. Moreno and the Psychodramatic Method'

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The growing interest in psychodrama, in its origins and applications, are the main reasons for the publication of Jacob Levy Moreno's first volume on Psychodrama (1946). According to him: 'The growth of practice in psychodrama and group psychotherapy has been so rapid since the start of World War II that a careful evaluation of the theoretical and practical issues can no longer be postponed. Their use, even in their most diluted forms, is fraught with dangers in the hands of the uninformed and unskilled.'

Psychodrama is a method of group and individual psychotherapy in which people are helped to explore their psychosocial issues by using sensitively guided enactment and a wide range of action-based techniques. During a psychodrama session, the person in focus recreates significant events, relationships, or internal processes in order to explore their impact, integrate new responses, and gain insight, healing, and growth (Baim, 2010, pp. 1–3).

Since its introduction in the 1940s, the application of psychodrama, as well as its theoretical implications, have been far-reaching. Fast forward in 2019, the incisive book *J.L. Moreno and the Psychodramatic Method* is written by John Nolte (2019), a respected trainer and practitioner of psychodrama in the US. He trained both with the creator Dr J.L. Moreno and his wife Zerka. His experience in the method of psychodrama and its application in different settings spans some 50 years.

The book is an easy read and is full of examples of different aspects of the psychodrama process (Dutton, 2019). It takes the reader through the basic component parts of a psychodrama session and breaks them down into a description as well as examples which include the areas of initial interview, scene setting, soliloquy, role reversal, the double, the mirror, the empty chair, and concretisation.

There are other parts also described of the method of psychodrama which the reader might want to use on an individual basis to enhance or add to a therapy session or use in a training event to add a new way of looking at a particular issue/dilemma or highlight a specific concept/idea in a training session. We are, after all, thinking, feeling, physical, social, and spiritual beings – which Dr J.L. Moreno was most interested in in his work.

John Nolte works through the stages of a psychodrama over the next chapters moving through the warm up phase and creating the drama (Cruz et al., 2018). Each part has good descriptions of the specifics of these areas of a psychodrama as well as excellent descriptions of the director (therapist) interviewing or guiding the protagonist (client/patient) during a particular phase of the developing psychodrama. Often in psychodrama the old saying don't just tell me show me is heard- here John Nolte is showing us through his writing how a psychodrama is and what it looks like through his description of such things as the first scene or future projections.

The author looks briefly within this chapter on creating the drama about specific issues such as working with childhood abuse scenes, expressing anger, dreams, and role training. In Chapter 5, he describes and gives voice to four protagonists and also of the writer himself as an auxiliary of seven psychodrama's they and him have been involved in. Life is given to each session which gives the reader an insight into how a psychodrama session has an effect upon the protagonist.

The chapter which delves beyond psychotherapy shows how psychodrama techniques can be used outside of the traditional therapy space which include role playing and its use in education which I have often used within schools and in particular the use in educating and preparing trial lawyers in the US at the Trial Lawyers College. John Nolte has a long association with this since 1994 along with Don Clarkson. During his time there it is estimated that three to four thousand trial lawyers have had some experience of psychodrama. Meanwhile, the last couple of chapters look at psychodrama theory, its history, and the aspirations of Dr J. L. Moreno and how his methods permeate across different areas which include therapy, social science, and spontaneous theatre.

The book seeks to offer a nuanced perspective to that of the classic psychodrama session: warm-up, action, sharing and the subsequent processing. Chapters on psychodrama in action cover discussions on the innovative use of psychodrama in the treatment of depression, and the relationship of the discipline to other constellation of psychotherapies. Nolte's book is a welcomed addition to the text's on psychodrama and will I think encourage the reader to go read some more as well as try out the different aspects of this creative and dynamic therapy.

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