

if you're already a mental health professional, and your employer knows you attend psychodrama workshops, you may expect to hear, **You'll be doing psychodrama for us soon, won't you?** Do you dare plead incompetence in the face of an uncertain economy? This may, however, be the strategic moment to educate your employer to the reality one must have continuing supervision from a fully qualified teaching psychodramatist (TEP) to do this responsibly. In this way we accumulate credit over a period of time, which moves one forward toward validation, giving you the recognition you deserve. When employers understand the situation, they realize it's less expensive to underwrite supervision than hire practitioners in psychodrama, if indeed such may be found. Employers disinclined to make concessions to the demands of the profession very likely underestimate the difficulty and the potential of the method, expose patients to unnecessary risk, and risk malpractice suits.

If you attend ongoing psychodrama patient groups, serve as auxiliary or double as needed, and sit for processing afterwards, this is one good way to begin. Another way is to come to a series of weekend or day workshops over a period of months. Preferably both! But only after you've been protagonist several times should you seek opportunity from within a group of peers to take your first steps as director.

Psychodrama is group psychotherapy. The group is the vehicle of change. Directors of psychodrama take a more active role than most group therapists, and structure the psychodrama in such a way as to focus the group effort on one protagonist at a time. Director and protagonist coproduce the protagonist's story in action, bringing members of the audience to the stage as needed to play the role of absentees. Just as group psychotherapists try to move there and then into here and now, so do psychodrama directors, but the psychodramatist will welcome

there and then content, to re-create it here and now on stage. In the process the protagonist's there-and-then-recreated-in-the-here-and-now becomes the group member's here and now as well. This is manifest in the director's involving various members of the audience as auxiliaries or doubles, and also in the sharing which concludes the session. In sharing group members relate the here and now, just experienced to parallels from their own there and then, thereby closing the emotional gap between the world outside and the world within the group. Thus the audience member derives psychotherapeutic benefit along with the protagonist. Beginning directors must be clear on this to avoid supporting the naive assumption that the protagonist is the only person receiving therapy. To fail to correct that outrageous idea down-grades psychodrama to a cost-ineffective form of individual therapy within a group situation, as if it were undeserving of full recognition as group psychotherapy. If we neglect educating administrators in this, we invite having psychodrama cut, as if it were a therapeutic luxury.

Psychodrama directors always place events within their time, space, person and reality contexts. This is taken for granted with protagonists, but directors must extend an awareness of contextual perspectives to the group-as-a-whole. Consider these questions: In what institutional setting is this group being done? What aims and goals are apparent from the institutional history? What reputation does psychodrama have with other professionals?

You may be shocked to discover the widespread assumption that psychodrama is a ventilation exercise which runs rough-shod over patients' defenses, getting patients all stirred-up, and creating an aftermath of havoc. Accordingly doctors may limit patient participation, for no one has taken the time to show them how we develop controls and guide integration more effectively than those therapies which regularly ignore network and action dimensions. What you do in your work setting toward developing understanding

out the group is just as important as what you do within the group.

Moreover, let us not be in such great haste to find a protagonist that we fail to pick up on the abundant indications which arise when members of a group become preoccupied with their life with one another outside the group. Unless our clientele are outpatients with no common life beyond the group, we must be particularly attentive to ongoing relationships among them, focusing on anything likely to impact on the whole group, such as suicide, violence, elopements, discharges, and new accessions. Freely acknowledge the prevailing preoccupation! Welcome free expression and encounter. Then a protagonist may emerge to personify the group's central concern, our choice of whom would maximize group involvement. If residential processes aren't being handled back at the residence, and you'd be amazed how often they're not, you may not even find a protagonist for this particular session. On the other hand, your willingness to spend a few minutes at the beginning hearing persons out may be sufficient to allow the focus to return to individual protagonist issues, and let us get on with a classical protagonist centered session. Awareness must extend to yourself too, for whatever competes with attention to the group limits effectiveness. Occasionally you'll do well to tell the group what's bothering you, to get it out of the way. Let them know this is why you tell them: to remove any obstacle to your giving them your full attention.

Generally I go round the group, sounding out each and every member, and then ask who wants to be protagonist. I solicit support from the remaining members of the group for one or another among those who've offered themselves, and we go with the one who has majority support, taking care that those not chosen nevertheless feel that the director has heard their need and will keep it in mind for the future. The director models before the group concern for each and

every person present. Evidence of healthy identification with the director will be reflected in protagonist's spontaneously choosing disappointed protagonist candidates for important auxiliary roles. Protagonists often show uncanny ability in selecting persons for roles whose own dynamics ideally fit the situation. Moreno calls this two-way empathy **tele**.

At last we have a protagonist on stage. I sum up what I understand his interest to be, and ask whether that's what he wants to work on. This is a preliminary contract, subject to revision later, with mutual consent between director and protagonist. The more common and readily do-able contracts have to do with relationships past, present and future, and with persons, living or dead.

When the protagonist speaks of feelings as if they were entities in their own right ("I have this anger in me...etc."), the director seeks to place them in their interpersonal context. Or if the protagonist focuses on some troublesome personal trait, he calls for examples of its occurrence.

The director wants to get the protagonist into action as soon as possible rather than risk having the protagonist talk away his warmup. Often the protagonist alludes to a situation which exemplifies what he's saying, at which the alert director says: **Let's see that**. But don't hang back waiting for that to happen. Take the initiative with: **What brought this issue up at this particular time? Let's see that**.

Next come the context questions:

**When is this?** Today, yesterday, last week, last month? Morning, afternoon, evening or night?

**Where is this?** Near here, far away, outdoors, indoors?

**Who's there with you?** And who is he/she? Parent, child, friend, lover...etc.

**Who in the group may represent he, she or it?**

the possible auxiliary may hesitate at having no previous knowledge of the part to be played, so the director reassures them with **I'm going to interview the protagonist as if he were X.** Then I say to the protagonist,

**take a posture like X. How does X sit? Show us.**

**What is your name?** I'm pleased to meet you.

**Help us to see you. How old are you?**

**Are you tall or short? Fat or thin? What do you do?**

**How do you have fun?**

**What is your connection with the protagonist?**

**Do you know he/she is here at the hospital?**

When I'm interviewing a family member, which is often the case, I'll learn whether this is a natural parent or child, a step-parent or child, or a foster-parent or child...etc. I may ask about connections with others in the family network, but I avoid asking for details about the relationship with the protagonist, for I intend getting at that in action. **I do not ask psychological questions, but focus on concrete, descriptive matters.**

I am likely to ask whether all participants in a scene are present there from the beginning. Especially when the protagonist arrives from elsewhere, I back up the scene a bit to get his soliloquy on the way. With participants on stage I ask **Who speaks first?** If it's not the protagonist, I call for a **role reversal** with that person, to supply the necessary lines. And then I reverse back so that the protagonist may reply. If someone else replies instead, I wait till I've got the protagonist back into his own role before I reverse him once more into the second auxiliary's role to supply those lines. I avoid having too many people on stage at the beginning, suggesting to the protagonist that he eliminate those who are nonessential to the scene, or representing them with empty chairs. We should not let the scene get too complicated at the outset for the beginning protagonist. He has all those

helpful psychodrama conventions to learn before he can fully function in role.

The meaning of the opening scene comes from the history of the protagonist's participation in previous scenes of his life. But which ones? We lack the psychoanalysts' leisure to explore them all. But fortunately the protagonist has a way of referring back to other instances of what he's up against. I wouldn't jump at the first clue he gives me, but remember it as I listen for a better or clearer one. The protagonist responds to his feelings, which in turn are based upon what his experience has taught him is reality. There is something he wants, and something stands in the way of his getting it. The director may believe that something should be no obstacle at all; it wouldn't be for directors, but directors come from a different life history, with differing expectations. The protagonist is afraid of something. What? Often we learn the answer from what he says and does while in the role reversed position. What may we do to reduce the threat?

People isolate themselves to protect themselves, without ever seeming to realize this puts them more than ever at risk. They confess a lack of trust. This means someone whom they thought they could trust has let them down. This usually take us to the experience of betrayal or of abuse. Or, just as often this indicates loss, as when one dies, moves away, holds a grudge...etc. When the problem is loss, depressed people typically hold themselves responsible for the loss, like "I should've seen it coming. Or, if I had only said or done this or that it wouldn't have happened." The protagonist blames himself after the fact, for something most people would not have anticipated. One of our tasks is teaching people to be fair with themselves, and forgive themselves no less willingly than they forgive others.

That doesn't come easily to persons whose parent-figures have held unrealistically high expectations overhead. Here is a child in the process of sacrificing everything in the hope of doing the impossible. The possibility may have been real for

the parent. For one thing we may assume it's what the parent wanted to do, and there were ways of doing it back then which may not be open to the child of today. Even more unreasonably, the parent didn't do it either, and regrets not having done it, but now hopes that the child, as if he were a part of himself, will do it for him! Thus parental approval comes with strings attached.

In the long run strings make the price too high, and protagonists give up that battlefield for the sake of another, such as adult love relationships. Without benefit of therapy, people rarely recognize this as the same old thing once again. The director's task is to structure the psychodrama in such a way that the protagonist spontaneously discovers the connection. The sequence:

move from the scene with parent-figure to scene with the love-interest, > back to the parent-figure, taking a stance which neutralizes the old issue, > then returning to the relationship with the peer on a more realistic basis.

Or one may begin with the love-interest, trace the antecedents to childhood, resolve that, and return to the contemporary situation with greater understanding. Childhood peer relationships tend to be reproduced in adult peer relationships, both inside and outside families. Likewise one finds carryovers between school and workplace. The protagonist's discovery of the connection returns control of his life back to him, making him stronger and more effective.

The strategy advocated in classical protagonist-centered psycho-dramas involves developing a story. This is not for the sake of audience entertainment, but good theater imitates life, and invites everyone present to recognize themselves in what is before them.

I have set forth enough to get the director started in this, but there is a limit in how much can be absorbed through one paper. Classical psychodrama may be likened to a

chess game. Discussions of chess focus on openings, the middle game, and closing. In this form of psychodrama the opening game ends with the director's discovery of the fundamental connection, the basic insight into what the protagonist is all about. The director must not offer this understanding, for it requires validation, and the middle game moves from the moment of the director's initial insight to the moment when the protagonist spontaneously grasps the connection as his own. All too often psychodramas end here, as if rationality could be counted on to prevail from henceforth. I will grant that this is an improvement over those who feel the job has been done when ventilation has occurred, but the genius of psychodrama is its power to integrate. At the very least this requires restructuring of old roles and the creation of new roles. This is analogous to what in psychoanalysis is called **working through**. Armed with the shared knowledge of connection we move into the final phase of the psychodrama, which I call **repair-work**. It may involve **changing the past**, that is, placing a preferred history side-by-side with the sad history of having been a victim, whereby this time the protagonist takes charge of his life and chooses outcomes which more fully express who he is coming to be.

Years ago one of my patients summed it up. I overheard his telling a newcomer **psychodrama is like a dry run, where your head doesn't know the difference**. We have no uninterpreted realities. More that what has happened is the meaning we've given to it. Alter the con-text and you change the meaning. Change the meaning and you've changed the experience. With new experiences transcending the old the protagonist builds a new, more livable identity, and the world confirms the protagonist in it, beginning with the group.