

REPAIR WORK AND CLOSING IN PSYCHODRAMA

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Beginning students in psychodrama find the second half of a session more difficult than the first half. Getting into the material is no longer a problem. The problem becomes what to do with it now that you've got it. This is our concern here, together with bringing the session to an appropriate close.

In the first half the protagonist has presented a problem or a need. The director may have accepted this at face value, and led the protagonist to expect that in this psychodrama the problem would be solved and/or the need met. We cannot afford to be so casual about getting locked into contracts we cannot hope to fulfill. Let the director suggest a way of re-phrasing the situation such that the protagonist no longer expects a 'quick fix' which in the nature of the case the director cannot deliver.

For example, to 'get rid of that part of me I don't like,' or a little more specifically, 'to rid me of my anxiety' sets the matter up in a way no director should agree to face. More modestly, the director asks in what way is this a problem? And how has the protagonist attempted to deal with this? and finally, **In what way would you like me to help you?** Now if the protagonist persists in the original request, the director has some information on the basis of which to make a deal. For example,

I see you've been facing this a long time, and what's been done so far hasn't seemed to work. I cannot, in one short session, lead you to hope for an immediate solution, when the best others have done has yielded so little satisfaction for you. What I suggest we may do is 'this,' and follow through on stage to see where it leads. Then you may reach an opinion on whether this is something for you to do in life, or whether, instead, we should try something else.

When we put it that way, the protagonist becomes more realistic, and having trimmed the goal down to size, we have set the task before us in such a way that a measure of success become likely, and the patient, with 'another failure' avoided, and with self-esteem enhanced, will show more inclination to follow through in action beyond the stage.

I've taken the time to make this point because beginning directors frequently paint themselves into corners through having failed to structure the first half properly. Sadly they don't tumble to the impossibility of the situation till the second half. Of course they don't know what to do. If you find yourself there, by all means, swallow your pride and **renegotiate!**

But let us suppose you've agreed to a realistic contract, and the psychodrama has been moving along a straightforward path of protagonist self-presentation, ventilation, and group acceptance. What we're likely to have come to is **a wrong to be righted, or relationships to be established, restored, or abandoned.** The protagonist will have shown whether he blames others, himself, or no one for the situation. He will reach for explanations in terms of the past, or of the impact of present forces in his life. These will 'justify' the course of action to be taken.

The director marshalls the evidence which supposedly shows that **more of the same** offers hope. Protagonists may reason that if a little bit doesn't do anything, a lot more may. On the contrary, if a little bit shows nothing, why should we expect a lot to show more? That would be repeating the same mistakes on a larger scale.

The director draws upon a huge reservoir of pertinent questions. **Whose problem is this?** or **For whom is this a problem?** This leads the psychodrama to the interpersonal relationships, past or present, which are the source of the conflict. We teach the pro-tagonist that he is the person who sets, or agrees to, the terms of the problematic relationship. If he's been a victim, he need not continue to be a helpless victim. But he sees himself as weak. Anyone alone is. That's why we need one another. Who are the important persons in the protagonist's life? Which of these are prepared to come to his aid? Let's hear what they have to say.

As often as not we find that some of these are part of the problem. What price must he pay to continue to rely on these persons? If the price is too high, and it usually is, then this calls for one's initiating a new basis for the relationships! If the others are not open to this, then the protagonist must reach out to persons who are prepared to be more comforting and giving to him. Protagonists are generally disinclined to accept substitutes. But if the significant other has proved incapable of doing what the protagonist had long expected, then the time has come to look elsewhere, and to choose among those available, who'd be glad to do what the other has proved unable or unwilling to do.

Now the task becomes, **how do I go about asking for what I want? What do I do if he/she says no?** Then they'll expect something of me. True. Is what they'd expect unreasonable? But I'm not ready to trust, or I'm not ready to commit myself. Then it's my problem rather than theirs. How has life taught me that I'm so vulnerable. Am I judging present persons as if they were just like past persons? If that were so, I could hope for no resolution.

Protagonists are forever getting stuck. They say **I can't** when they should be saying **I won't**. This is to say, I may indeed respond to the situation, if I find the long-closed door unlocked after all. I can't know till I turn the knob. The psychodrama stage provides a safe arena for such discoveries. When too many defenses have been built up for us to attack the matter head-on, a timely **concretization** moves a metaphor into action. The habitual use of words may have allowed us no breathing space, whereas exploration in action gets protagonists out of the old ruts. This makes rewards available, whereas previously they'd seemed unattainable. Protagonists in quitting the beaten path find themselves freed of old constraints, and face a newly opened future.

Keep in mind how fear holds us back, and how readily we can create a safe space on stage. Remember how fearful the protagonists are of being judged. Provide them with convincing evidence they have not been judged as they might've expected with group sharing and feedback. From the role reversed position, they discover new perspectives to enlarge their worlds. [For a whole book devoted to examples see my *Catharsis and Closure* (1999), Beacon Reminders Psychodramas and Pastoral Studies].