

WHAT IS PSYCHODRAMA?

J.L. Moreno, the originator of psychodrama, defined it as the science which explores the “truth” by dramatic methods. It “deals with interpersonal relations and private worlds.” By truth, Moreno means the personal truth of the protagonist, the subject of a psychodrama. We all live in the same world, yet each of us has our own personal experience of it. Although there is enough general agreement concerning the nature of the world to convince us that we share a common universe, we each experience it and interpret it a little differently. Moreno’s “truth” refers to each person’s unique perception of the world, of one’s place in it and one’s relationships with others who co-create this world.

These relationships are the most important aspect of our world. Psychodrama makes them explicit. It uncovers the internal perceptions, memories, thoughts, emotions, fantasies, dreams, even hallucinations and delusions, giving all these tangible form on the psychodramatic stage. The audience is then able to perceive in a physical, concrete way this inner world; and, with the help of the director and “auxiliary egos”, the protagonist is able to explore his/her relationships in detail. This generally results in an enlarged and altered perception of the protagonist’s world, themselves and their significant others in ways that make sense out of what was up to this point unexplainable. In short, psychodrama permits us to explore our worlds and learn more about ourselves, our significant others and our relationships with them.

The psychodramatic method is a way of looking at and understanding subjective human experience. It includes a number of techniques which permit us to re-visit and re-enact past experiences, examine current relationships, and explore dreams, fantasies and our expectations of what the future may bring. The director of the psychodrama serves as guide, technician and prompter, helping the protagonist identify important internal processes and produce them in dramatic form. Members of the group help out as auxiliary egos or stand-ins for absent significant others. The method is systematic which means that it can be taught and learned. It is not magical; nor is the director a magician.

Although psychodrama is usually considered to be a form of psychotherapy, and has been most widely applied in the mental health fields, psychotherapy is only one of its many functions. It is also a powerful method for teaching and training, for engendering spontaneity and creativity, for conducting research, and it is also a playful art form, a true version of drama.