

## **HISTORY OF DRAMA THERAPY**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The word drama comes from ancient Greek and means quite literally “things done” (Harrison, 1913). Drama therapy is, in simplest terms, the use of action techniques, particularly role play, drama games, improvisation, puppetry, masks, and theatrical performance, in the service of behavior change and personal growth. It has its roots in religion, theatre, education, social action, and mental health/therapy

### **ANCIENT ROOTS: RELIGION AND THEATRE:**

Evidence in archeological records suggests that early humans began to make art – paintings, sculpture, music, dance, and drama – during the Upper Paleolithic period about 45,000-35,000 years ago. Experts marvel at the suddenness with which the arts burst onto the human scene and tie it to the beginnings of symbolic, metaphoric thought (Pfeiffer, 1982; Mithen, 1996; Lewis-Williams, 2002). Simultaneous with this creative explosion, shamans and priests began utilizing the arts in their healing and religious practices. The origins of the arts and religion seem to be intertwined because the arts naturally provided effective symbolic ways to express abstract religious ideas. Dance and drama, in particular, were extremely useful in rites to create sympathetic and contagious magic as well as to embody myths and rituals. Details about these ancient origins are sketchy, but many scholars have hypothesized about those origins, based on surviving cave paintings, artifacts, myths, and even on extrapolating from contemporary shamanistic practices (Pfeiffer, 1982; Lewis-Williams, 2002). Greek scholar and cultural anthropologist Jane Ellen Harrison, for instance, theorizes that early art developed directly out of ritual from mimesis or imitation of an experience and became an abstract representation or metaphor which was then available for magical use (Harrison, 1913). However, without a written record providing direct testimony, we cannot know exactly what those ancient practices entailed and how those ancient humans understood their ceremonies.

Eventually, the art form of theatre developed out of religious rites and rituals. Western theatre history usually begins its formal accounts with ancient Greek theatre. Religious festivals dedicated to Dionysus, god of fertility and revelry, featured theatrical competitions in which plays brought mythology to life for the community. The Great Dionysia, held in Athens in early spring, featured tragedies, comedies, and satyr plays written by citizen-poets and performed by citizen-actors for the entire populace. During a choral presentation at one of

these festivals around 560 B.C. Thespis, the first actor, stepped away from the chorus to take on an individual character for the first time and theatre, as we know it, was born (Brockett, 1968).

The first written theoretical account of drama therapy can be found in connection with Greek theatre. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle says the function of tragedy is to induce catharsis – a release of deep feelings (specifically pity and fear) to purge the senses and the souls of the spectators (Aristotle, trans. 1954). These cathartic feelings are experienced empathically for the characters in the play by the individuals watching the performance and they share that theatrical/cathartic experience with others in the audience magnifying the release and allowing for an adjustment in the community's attitude as a whole. According to Aristotle, drama's purpose is not primarily for education or entertainment, but to release harmful emotions which will lead to harmony and healing in the community (Boal, 1985).

In his analysis of Aristotle's work, Brazilian director Augusto Boal (1985) suggests that this cathartic release helped preserve the status quo in Greek society, for a populace that is content and at peace will not rebel against the rulers in power. Aristotle's ideas about catharsis have influenced many psychotherapy models from Freudian psychoanalysis onward by focusing psychotherapeutic work on the idea that insight into troubling emotional issues and healing occurs only after the patient has achieved catharsis. This process is disputed as unrealistic and unnecessary by cognitive-behavioral therapists, rational-emotive therapists, and others who feel that catharsis and insight are not enough to induce healing or change, that new thoughts and behaviors must be learned to replace the old, and that change doesn't automatically follow emotional release and understanding.

Drama therapy applies techniques from theatre to the process of psychotherapeutic healing. It emerged as a field in the late 1970's from hospital and community programs where it was first used with clients to produce plays and later was integrated with improvisation and process drama methods. The focus in drama therapy is on helping individuals grow and heal by taking on and practicing new roles.

While much drama therapy aims at helping people who are in therapy, drama therapists have extended their applications beyond clinical contexts to enrich the lives of at-risk individuals, to prevent problems, and to enhance wellness of healthy people. Many of the skills for such extensions require a measure of training psychological training as well as a strong basis in theatre.

At base drama and psychology are both the study of human behavior two sides of the same coin. Psychology is the study of thoughts, emotions and behavior; drama actively analyzes and presents the thoughts, emotions and behavior of characters for an audience to see and understand. Much of dramatic literature

addresses the psychological, social, and cultural conditions of humanity and, thus, serves as a natural vehicle for actually helping real people with problems more consciously address their problems.

Just as psychotherapy treats people who have difficulties with their thoughts, emotions and behavior, drama therapy uses drama processes (games, improvisation, storytelling, role play) and products (puppets, masks, plays/performances) to help people understand their thoughts and emotions better or to improve their behavior. However, unlike most types of therapy which rely purely on talking (psychoanalysis was, after all, called "the talking cure"), drama therapy relies on taking action on doing things!

The drama therapist is trained in four general areas: drama/theatre, general and abnormal psychology, psychotherapy, and drama therapy. Each of these categories involves a number of required classes, many of them experiential, where one learns by doing, practicing, getting supervisory feedback, and refining skills. In the end, the drama therapist is able to facilitate the client's experience in a way that keeps the client emotionally and physically safe while the client benefits from the dramatic process.

## WHAT IS DRAMA THERAPY

Because there are so many forms that drama can take, drama therapy can be considered a very broad field.

## THE DRAMA THERAPY PIE



Depending on the goals and needs of the client, the drama therapist chooses a method (or several) that will achieve the desired combination of understanding, emotional release, and learning of new behavior. Some methods, such as drama games, improvisation, role play, developmental transformations, sociodrama and psychodrama are very process-oriented and unscripted. The work is done within the therapy session and not presented to an audience. Other methods, such as Playback Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, and the performance of plays are more formal and presentational, involving an audience. Puppets, masks, and rituals can be used as part of performance or as process techniques within a therapy session.

Certain techniques: drama games, improvisation, role play, sociodrama, developmental transformations, rituals, masks, puppets and some types of performances involve fictional work. The client pretends to be a character different from him or herself. This can expand the client's role repertoire (or the number of types of roles that can be accessed for use in real life) or it can allow the client to explore a similar role to one he or she plays, but under the guise of "not-me-but-someone-like-me." Other techniques, such as Psychodrama, Therapeutic Spiral Model, Playback Theatre, Theater of the Oppressed and autobiographical performances, allow the client to explore his or her life directly. Clients need to have good ego strength to be able to do this kind of non-fiction work because it requires an honest, searching look at oneself.

Most drama therapists come from the world of theatre. They are individuals who realize the healing power of drama through therapeutic experiences they've had in their education or career and want to facilitate change and growth in others. Many recall that in college they were torn between majoring in psychology or theatre and decided to follow the theatre path. They want to use drama to help others in a direct way or to use theatre as a social change agent, rather than only as entertainment or education.

## **WHAT IS DRAMA THERAPY**

### **Key Principles**

A typical drama therapy session begins with a "Check-in" in which clients share how they are currently feeling. This provides important information to the drama therapist about how to lead the group that day, what issues are ready to be worked on, and what resistances will need to be worked past to get the group to function openly and smoothly. Next, the "Warm-up" gets everyone focused on each other and on being in the "here and now." A warm-up also loosens muscles that may be used in activities later in the session so no one gets hurt and prepares imaginations so everyone is ready to work together creatively and safely. Each session usually has at least one major drama therapy activity that is participated in and then discussed by the group. Those who have taken on a role

need to “de-role” afterwards in order to reconnect with themselves. The group ends with a closure activity: a game, a ritual, a review of the session, or a song.

Renee Emunah (1994) has identified five stages through which most drama therapy groups progress. Her five stage theory parallels established wisdom from group dynamics on how successful groups form and grow. The first stage is Dramatic Play where the group gets to know each other and the therapist through playing together to develop trust, group cohesion, and basic relationship skills. Then they move on to the Scenework Stage where they continue playing, but begin focusing on developing a lot of the dramatic skills they will need as they continue in treatment. All humans develop basic dramatic skills at the ages of 3-5, a time when they naturally begin learning about the world around them through imitation and dramatic play. As they grow older and begin school, children are encouraged to develop their abstract reasoning skills and use them to the exclusion of hands-on forms of learning. However, drama is like riding a bike. You never forget how to do it. The Dramatic Play and Scenework Stages allow clients to get back in touch with those skills and feel competent and confident using them again.

Stage Three focuses on Role Play, exploring issues through fictional means. Perhaps the group acts out a generic family conflict or a familiar character from a fairy tale or legend that goes through a crisis or challenge shared by group members. When the group is ready, they can move on to Stage Four: Culminating Enactments, where personal issues are acted out directly through psychodrama or autobiographical performance.

The final stage is Dramatic Ritual, which usually involves closure to the work of the group. This might be the sharing of a public performance that has been created by the group or the sharing of a private ritual within the group or an evaluation session where clients can review what they've learned, how they've changed, and where they can say goodbye and thanks to the people in the group who have helped them and to whom they have become close.

Not every drama therapy group works its way through all five stages. Some groups aren't together long enough to develop the skills and trust to reach the Culminating Enactment Stage. This is especially true in this day of limited reimbursement by health insurance for mental health services.

Age and developmental level makes a difference, too. Children often get the full benefit of emotional healing through play and fictional work alone, so there's no need to move on to some of the later stages. Some adult groups dealing with severe trauma or anger or who are extremely immature may not work through their trust issues enough to move on to Stage Four. That doesn't mean that they have “failed” as a drama group; it means they needed more time to heal at one particular emotional developmental level, perhaps because their wounds in that area were very deep.

While drama therapy techniques may differ from therapist to therapist or from session to session, there are concepts which are common to all forms. The first is using **metaphor through action**. Behaviors, problems, and emotions can be represented metaphorically, allowing for symbolic understanding. A certain set of behaviors can be looked at as a “role,” such as the role of mother, victim, student, or hero. These roles can be played out in a dramatic situation, leading to a greater understanding of the role as helpful or harmful, safe or dangerous. An emotion can be represented with a metaphorical image: anger displayed as a volcano, an exploding bomb, or a smoldering fire. These images can be dramatized, allowing the client more insight into the qualities of the emotion and how it functions positively or negatively in his/her life.

**Concrete embodiment** allows the abstract to become concrete through the client’s body. We all experience life first through our senses and our bodies, and only later, at older ages, through language and abstract thoughts. Acting out an idea or an experience allows it to become “more real” so it can be dealt with in fact rather than in the abstract, through feeling rather than only through thought, in the moment rather than through past or future projection. Embodiment allows clients to “experience” or “re-experience” in order to learn, to practice new behaviors, or to experiment with how to change old behaviors. This is particularly important for clients who are kinesthetic or visual learners (estimated to be at least two thirds of the population).

**Distancing** allows the therapist to change the degree to which the role being played is like you symbolically or like you actually. Children intuitively use distancing to protect themselves from shame and guilt in play by acting out characters similar to them, but not them. Pretending to be Gretel, abandoned in the forest by her mother and father, allows a child to explore her feelings of being punished or emotionally abandoned by her parents or a significant adult in her life.

Playing a role quite different from oneself often feels more comfortable than playing oneself directly. In some cases an experience is too “close” to us for us to see our part in it. We need to take a step back (metaphorically speaking) and see the experience in a wider context: to see the forest in order to see the tree.

Sometimes a situation is too emotional or intense for a client to encounter in therapy without becoming overwhelmed emotionally. More distance, through fictionalizing a situation, using a metaphor to represent the problem, or using a technique like puppets, removes the situation a step from flesh and blood reality and can help a client work on the issues without falling apart. On the other hand, some clients will create so much intellectual distance from an issue that they can’t get in touch with their feelings (see the story of Henry later). They need less fiction and more emotional involvement to be able to face the issue honestly and directly.

Certain drama therapy techniques tend to create more distance and others tend to create less distance. For example, psychodrama, which deals directly with the personal, nonfiction history of the client, is less distanced. Puppets, theatre games, and improvising fictional characters are more distanced. Some techniques can go either way, depending on how they are used. The performance of an autobiographical or self-relevatory play is less distanced than performance of a play about fictional characters. Role play can be very close to oneself or distanced, depending on the role being portrayed. (A note here: as every actor knows, the emotions in any role can feel very real while the role is being portrayed!)

**Dramatic Projection** is akin to concrete embodiment and employs metaphor. It is the ability to take an idea or an emotion that is within the client and project it outside to be shown or acted out in the drama therapy session. A client's difficulty asking for help (an internal problem) can be dramatized in a scene with other members of the group, with puppets, or through masks, so the problem becomes an external problem which can be seen, played with, and shared by the therapist and the group.

The creation of **Transitional Space** is an important component in many therapeutic and learning environments, but it is essential in drama therapy. Transitional space is the imaginary world that is created when we play or imagine together in a safe, trusting situation. It is a timeless space in which anything we can imagine can exist: dragons can be vanquished, castles can be built, raging rivers can be crossed, acceptance and love can be experienced. Transitional space is the place where change and healing can happen because it is potential space, a magic play space, Stanislavsky's "Magic If." It is created jointly by the therapist and the clients playing together and believing in the possible: that anything can happen.

**Incorporating the other Arts.** Drama therapists use music, movement, song, dance, poetry, writing, drawing, sculpture, mask making, puppetry, and other arts with their drama therapy activities. Just as the theatre is a crossroads where all the arts come together, drama therapy allows all the arts to meet and work together, too. Starting with writing and then enacting the story or poem or beginning with drawing and then embodying the art through movement, body sculpting, or drama is a natural way to progress. This is one reason drama therapists are required to have training in the other creative arts therapies and why many drama therapists have credentials in one of the other arts therapy modalities.

## **Applications**

Drama therapy is primarily conducted in groups, although there are practitioners who use it in individual, couples, or family counseling. Drama therapy can be

found in a wide variety of settings, used with many different kinds of clients. Any kind of therapy group that uses talk therapy can use drama therapy.

For some groups, the action methods of drama therapy are more effective. Recovering substance abusers are notorious for being disconnected from their feelings, for making up endless excuses (called rationalizations) for their behavior, and for "being in denial" about their addiction and addictive behaviors. Drama therapy bypasses the excuses and denial, getting right to the behavior. Other types of groups for instance, nonverbal clients or children who aren't good candidates for verbal therapy can often participate successfully in drama because they can show, rather than verbalize, how they feel.

Drama therapy is practiced in clinical settings, residential settings, correctional facilities, educational situations, corporations and businesses, community action settings, and social and recreational centers. The same techniques might be employed; what changes is the contract or agreement between the clients and therapist to work on a specific goal for particular issues or problems that the clients want to change.

### **A general description of a session**

Participants are engaged in activities twice a week for one hour, group consists of pupils with mental retardation. Educational games, plays, elements of theatre sport, logorhythmics, evolving elements of speech and motion have been used in activities as well as small sketches and scenic performances. In this video material you can see one activity where it is not possible to show the whole process of action. Process of action is built so that it become more and more difficult, no one has chance to be mistaken, because the aim is to adventure and open out to extent desirable at the moment for each participant.

#### 1. A word ( video No. 1-2)

All the participants stand in one line and calls up his name. The call is followed by sharp motion of a hand, that facilitates breathing. The hand has to be moved straight from the breast, and it is more like a kick of boxing not sending a ball. The name has stress on first syllable which is connected with the motion of hand. Develops: breathing with diaphragm, development of speech, coordination, rhythm, control of personal voice.  
Attīsta: elpošanu ar diafragmu, runas veidošana, koordinācija, ritms, savas balss kontrole u.c.

#### 2. Forms( videos No 3-7)

The exercise consists of two parts.



## 1st part

All the participants freely get around the room in different directions, not coming into contact with others. After teacher's request they change the temp of walking ( slow, quick, quiet.)

After a signal (clap of hands) the teacher shows a number showing how many persons will make a figure. Name of the figure is told together with the number, it can be unknown word to the participants or interesting combination of words forming a possibility of fantasy. When making the figures the main thing is focus in one place, point and pose. Usually four new figures are being made with a task to remember partners and place.

## 2nd part.

All the participants get freely round the room in different directions. After teacher's request they change the temp of walking ( slow, quick, quiet.)

After a signal ( clap of hands) the teachers tells the number and name of the figure, participants make the same figure in the same place as previously. In this way all the fixed figures in 1<sup>st</sup> part are repeatedly made.

Develops attention, fixation of motion, orientation in space, speech with concrete actions, imagination etc.

### 3. Twins( 8-11 video)

Participants divide into two pairs, settle hard by, not speaking with each other, silence in the room. The basic task is to feel a person standing by, not talking with him, making the same motions and act slowly and cordially.

### 4. Face (Video No 12)

Participants are asked to sit down on the floor or on chairs ( freely in the whole room), not disturbing each other. Short and brief situations are offered, participants show them with their motions and what is most important, with emotions shown in their faces without speaking. For example reading of thriller ( the offered action – reading of the moment when somebody will be killed), reading of a newspaper ( the offered action – reading of horoscopes, the participant has to show what he is reading), watching TV ( operation with console, switching to other channels, in this way everybody shows his attitude towards thing he sees in TV, for example, foot-ball, serial "The bold and the beautiful", animated cartoon "Dekster's lab" )etc.

Develops muscles of face, connection of speech with emotions, attitude

### 5. A car (Video No 13)

A car has been made consisting of chairs, two chairs at backside, two chairs in front, there are four participants in the car. Other participants are standing at the roadside and one of them is ready to stop the car and ask to take him for small

distance. The person who wants to stop the car prepares his image, for example, he has a headache or he is a raper. The person who wants to stop the car boards the car and all the passengers change for one place forward, the fourth passenger gets out. When changing all the passengers in the car takes over the image of the person who has boarded the car and act with these new expressions till a new passenger boards.

Develops: creativity, imagination, thinking, imitation etc.

#### 6. Monologue of a thing or a living being ( Video No 14-16)

All the participants think out for one person who he will be, for example, a spoon or a doctor. After that the participant soliloquizes, this has been thought out at the same moment, the main thing is that there should be an event and a solution. Very often is such way children can manage emotional experience from his mileage, but nobody connects this with the concrete person but with a play.

Develops imagination, creativity, formation of sentences, thinking, art of performance.

#### 7. A doll ( Video No 17-23)

Three participants interpret dolls, who have something broken. One of the participants is a master of dolls, who is looking for the defect by moving it gently. At the moment when the doll does not respond the action of the master, it means that there is the defect in this place. The master tells what the defect is and the doll confirms or denies it.

Develops : sensitivity, concentration, attention etc.

#### 8. An interpreter ( Video No 24-25)

It is possible to make different groups. In this case there is a group of four persons, two participants show a situation and speak incomprehensible language, two persons are interpreters who interpret his person. It is improvisation for all the persons, the main thing is to remember that the sketch should have a problem, tension and solution.

Develops: cooperation, concentration, imagination, conditions of formation of dialogue, detection of expression of action, reflection of emotions in motion and words, etc.

#### 9. Event X

No more than three persons are acting, other participants come to terms about the profession of the concrete person. The situation takes place in a park or in a shop. The chosen profession determines behavior, speech attitude towards things and other people. Improvisation has been shown, nothing is spoken about previously, three together try to create a story with a problem and solution.  
Develops: creativity, cooperation, collaboration etc.

#### 10. Gossip ( Video No 30)

No more than 30 participants queue in a line, they can stand in a line looking at each other's back. The first one invents a story and tells it to another one, the second one listens to it and tells the third participant the same story with other nuances and so it goes on till thirtieth participant, who goes to the first one and tells him the new version.

Develops: listening skills, imagination, thinking, art of communication, etc.

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### 11. Pocket ( Video No 31-32)

Participants divide into pairs. A dialogue is being made.

No1: You will never guess what I have in my pocket!

No2: I'll guess!

No1: You won't guess!

No2: I shall guess!

No1: What do I have in my pocket?

No2: You have.....( the participant tells anything what could be in 1<sup>st</sup> participant's pocket.

No1: How did you guess? Yes, I have a ....( the participant says in affirmative manner the thing invented by the other participant).

After that they change places.

Develops: construction of a dialogue, concentration, imagination, thinking, cooperation, acceptance of other people's thoughts.

### 12. Farewell ( Video No 33)

Participants repeat phrase of praise and motions of commendation. For example, you were attaboy today( taps himself on shoulder); I like you so much ( crosses hands on his breast); I am proud of you today ('pets himself on the head); I am happy to see you ( hands are open directed forwards), bye ( waves farewell regards).

Develops: understanding of meaning of praise of words and gesture, improvement of intonation, accumulation of positive emotions e