

Psychodramatic games in the teaching-learning process

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Abstract

The psychodramatic methodology is, in your essence, an active method. Psychodrama means *action* carried out in the social interrelations in a relaxed atmosphere, promoting freedom of speech for issuing new and creative responses, adapted to different situations. The application of the method in the teaching-learning process, through dramatic games and spontaneous activities, guarantees pedagogical effects above expectations, because it mitigates the power contained in the hierarchical interrelationship between teacher and students. The participants' experience, incorporated in a low-pressure environment and the concepts studied are applied in everyday social life. In this article, we propose to describe interventions focused on learning, raising theoretical hypotheses about how the method works, its effect on the quality of the repertoire of responses, and on the expansion of the perceptive ability of those involved in their various relationships: learner-apprentice, learner-teacher, learner-learning.

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INTRODUCTION

In order to respond to all these tasks, education must be organized around four fundamental learning which throughout their lives, will be in some way for each individual, the pillars of knowledge: learning to know, that is, to acquire the instruments of understanding; learning to do, to be able to act on the environment; learning to live together in order to participate and cooperate with others in all human activities; finally learning to be, an essential way that integrates the previous three (Delors, 2003).

The epigraph above presents the complete description of what we call the trinomial Education x Learning x Psychodrama. It is a global and totalizing vision of the human being, where learning is not restricted to the acquisition of skills or techniques to perform tasks or to

understand them in their operation. Also it involves the global development of the human being through education, which leads to various learning such as:

- Contact with reality;
- Achieving breakthrough;
- Execution of tasks;
- Valuing and developing the personality;
- Social coexistence, tolerance, resilience and social inclusion.

This article intends to address learning in the plural, based on the overall view of the individual, which presupposes the stimulation and the promotion of conditions to the learner, so that it is enriched with acquisitions that are found in the fields of cognition, emotion, affection, intuition and sociability.

Learning is a process. Learning is to transform and change. Personal transformation results in character building. Strengthening a person expands subjectively, intellectually and socially. Learning is passing:

- From one family state to another as yet unknown;
- From preserved standards to others being tested or discovered;
- From stability, comfort zone, to the challenge of novelty.

The Psychodrama presupposes the Human Being in its origin as Being-of-action, Being-social and Being-spontaneous, and through its theories and techniques, proposes the effectiveness and the acceleration of ways that facilitate integral and healthy development of this Human Being. Psychodramatic encounters are preferably group. If they are not, the group formation and/or coexistence of the individual is always presupposed in what is taught/learned. There is no possibility of approaching the learner without considering their reference groups, highlighting their origin (family or identity matrix), those of coexistence (affective, professional and social) or the one they faced at the exact moment of the psychodramatic encounter. It is not excessive to recall Baptista's (2014) statement: "it is characteristic of Psychodrama to emphasize the fact that each individual represents a group" (p. 125).

The Psychodramatic Game in the teaching-learning process

Any teaching-learning process can occur naturally, without interference from previous intentions or formal, scheduled and official procedures of a community or a society. In a classroom, culturally institutionalized content and standardized questions are offered to be taught/learned by formal instructional programs. In a recreational activity, with emphasis on those involving several people, this clarity is not always present – in this case, the highlights are leisure, hobby, dispute and fun. However, in a game, with its rules and objectives, if the participant is minimally involved, it will raise new acquisitions such as: respect for others, following rules, logical reasoning, specific skills, group coexistence, respect for others and

improvement of senses. That is, there are cultural, cognitive, pedagogical, social, affective and educational acquisitions in a simple game, be it playful, dramatic, sporty, competitive – cultural residues present in all age groups or groups of a community. Fernandez (2001) states:

Playing is taking and not taking the reality of things. Playing is the experience of being an author. It is to make the deep, tragic and wonderful experience of being absolutely different from all others and in turn absolutely similar to all others. . . Playing opens the doors of thinking and doing. (p. 71)

For the participant or learner, the consciousness of the several *learned* is not always set when the focus falls on what the experience provides of playfulness, pleasure or even competition. In Psychodrama, especially in the Comment stage, one can privilege this awareness and expansion of the contents seized in a particular game, especially if it is dramatic or spontaneous and that results in the production and representation of scenes from the plot created collectively at the time of the encounter.

Using a formal teaching experience with psychodramatic resources, one can cite the experience in a subject of the specialization course in Psychodrama, in which the author was a teacher, to illustrate the students' global involvement and the memorization of the contents involved, even after some time. One of the points of the menu indicated the History of Psychodrama and Life of J. L. Moreno, between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The author's proposal was that this activity be developed through seminars prepared and presented by subgroups of the students who were responsible for the stages of this history. They were asked to create a psychodramatic form of presentation. The students' enthusiastic involvement in the preparation was visible, although at times they showed some discomfort for what the novelty required of changes in the known format to accomplish this task. The seminars, one each week, were very creative, with relevant content and emphasis on the aesthetic and dramatic quality of the scenes that developed the plots, with prepared scenarios and scenic resources (costumes and materials) surprising and consistent with the historical era represented. Task was accomplished, since there was general satisfaction of both the teacher and the students. It is important to note that about five years later, the author met one of these alumni at a congress. In a quick chat in an attempt to recover his time off, he remembered these lessons. He reported that he had had a chance encounter with one of his colleagues in his subgroup some time before, and that they had some nostalgia about the presentation they made at the time. This former student commented that: *"It's interesting that there are things that we record and do not forget. That activity was remarkable"*. Personal experience triggers cognition, contaminates the affective field, fixes and prolongs memory, and sometimes makes recalling pleasant. We agree with Araujo's (1974) vision, which states: "The [theater] in Education will only achieve its objectives if it is not a comfortable repetition, but a work of experience, discussion, evaluation and conclusion" (p. 21).

In another experiment, which aimed to teach Spontaneous Theater to a group of students in an experiential approach, with the plot created by them, the characters involved were a military man (responsible for the safety of a public square), a small group of musicians and singers and another subgroup composed of a family (whose house was in the vicinity of that square). A conflict was established between these two groups and the soldier was summoned to mediate in the tumult. Both sides defended themselves: the group of artists wanted to play and sing at will; *"After all"*, they argued, *"the square is public"*. The neighboring family demanded the prohibition of this action, *"because"* they argued, *"we often lose sleep because of the noise of these people"*. For some time, the military who tried to calm everyone, was verbally assaulted, accused by both parties of protecting the other side, but the soldier managed to be patient and reasonable to reach an agreement with all: a time limit was set for the artists

who accepted, and the family agreed that the proposal was reasonable. Obviously, neither party considered the agreement to be ideal, but they realized the need for tolerance and sacrifice for effective and peaceful social coexistence. Upon returning to the group, the actors shared their feelings about the experience, highlighting the weariness among the characters, the initial disagreement which was difficult to solve, the difficulty of mutual understanding and the reasonable final agreement. In the comments phase, the actor who personified the soldier reflected:

“I never imagined representing a military man ... it was difficult ... but I think that from now on I will look at this professional with a different eye ... I had a little prejudice ... I think, from what I felt during the dramatization, that he is going through difficult times and can be an important mediator in conflicts and interpersonal tensions ... And it must be necessary in other moments of social life too.”

This military role that is somewhat socially stereotyped could be expanded in the internal world of the actor and the other colleagues of the group, who took responsibility for the plot in the Dramatic Context. In the scenes that unfolded on stage, this actor counted on group permission and was guided by the demands of the plot, for his own freedom and creativity to compose the *performance* of his character, reflect and enrich himself with the perception of aspects of the life of this professional, previously unknown. Blatner and Blatner (1996) extend our vision by stating:

One of the basic principles of science is that deductive reasoning is not enough to actually learn about life; experiments are required. There is a consensus that in complex situations, there may be a large number of unpredictable variables... In psychological questions, it is tantamount to stating that verbal discussions are not enough for genuine learning; a multidimensional approach would be indispensable to clarify problems and test new approaches. (p. 61)

J. L. Moreno (2008) professed that the purpose of learning may not be in the accuracy of task performance, but in the spontaneity of the individual's overall organization, and stressed the importance of spontaneous co-ordination among participants and in individual-group interaction when action is together.

In Psychodrama, it seems impossible to imagine learning situations without moving bodies, experimenting with roles and representing scenes. In the dramatic setting, participants play real-life moments or elaborate situations from their fantasies. Through imitations of reality, imagined scenes, or life-metaphor-situations, actors experiment, test, discover formats, alternatives, sequences, and relational interactions. The low level of tension, ensured by the Dramatic Context, facilitates the new and creative executions, *which in this regard, teach* behaviors, actions, reactions, possibilities, interlocations with original characters and unprecedented entanglements. On the importance of the relaxed field, Kaufman (1992) says:

There is enrichment of the field when it is relaxed, and impoverishment when it is tense. Enrichment is not only about the possibilities of conduct, but also about relationships. In the relaxed field, it is possible for the animal to develop a multiform relationship with things. . . . Whereas in the tense field, the pressure of the goal of instinct illuminates in a dazzling way only the short and distressing way, leaving the rest in obscurity; while the instinctive conduct under tension encounters a “tunnel” of action . . . which is presented as the shortest way to

reach its goal, the relaxed field is illuminated by a similar light and opens to a multifaceted set of movements. (p. 52)

The Dramatic Context, a field of the *As If*, assures very elastic and liberal rules, which allows the world of imagination and fantasy to preponderate and compete on equal terms with the world of reality, to such a degree that the differentiation between past, present and future times is diluted, that they lose their original states and *symmetry*. In this context, abstract or unthinkable characters materialize; dreams and fantasies materialize; subjective reality is *objectified*. Again, Kaufman (1992) complements:

. . . the fact of being able to play, being able to act in the “as if” and, therefore, in a more relaxed field, favors a better understanding of the situation experienced. Relating to a character does not bring, on a reality level, the same implicit commitment that exists in the presence of the [person] in fact (tense field). Free and less anxious, [the actor] frees a greater load of spontaneity, essential in the good interpretation of the role in learning. (p. 53)

Then, in the Sharing phase, back to the Group Context where we want a welcoming environment, the participants are encouraged to comment on what they experienced and to report the experience from the subjective point of view. In this movement of exchanges, people affect and are affected by the testimonies and the experiences of others. Moreover, by further distancing itself from comments phase that focuses on cognitive focus, each participant can highlight and share what they learned at the time of the meeting and activate awareness and generalization of these contents for personal life.

With psychodramatic resources, any subject you want to teach in formal or non-formal education can make learning an experience of pleasure, lightness or even fun. For example, in an Internal Accident Prevention Commission (CIPA) training, there was a request to respond to industry demand which identified in its employees, a resistance to wearing hearing protectors during a work shift. The company then asked to promote the awareness of employees for this practice – a mandatory item of security by law for those who work in noisy environments. Obviously, the methodology of Psychodrama was used. Initially, with an explanatory poster through figures and small theoretical texts, they were informed about the anatomical parts of the ear and their functions in the hearing work. The author described and demonstrated the entire auditory process from the entrance of the sound to the arrival at the brain and the repercussions in the organism. Then each participant was asked to represent, as a character, a part of the ear, the sound, the brain (which discriminates the sound in its details: volume and intensity) and the ear protectors.

Before the actual performance, a quick rehearsal was made, as they were very new actors. Already at that time, it was possible to realize that these officials had understood the process of hearing and the damage that exaggerated sounds can cause in the body. Hence the need to use the protectors. The “official” representation was stimulating: each one took on the role of his character and acted with coherent expressions, since each component of the ear has a specific function and action. The scene that featured the shrill sound - also transformed into a character and represented by an actor – running through every ear to the brain and causing stressors in the body, made clear the message of who represented-as-learned. Then they rehearsed the performance, now with the use of ear protectors. This movement was always accompanied by laughter and inhibitions, but the work took place and the goal was achieved. There is no exaggeration in concluding that these participants: a) had fun, which ensured that the task was light, with minimal tension; b) discovered their ability to play roles of extras in a representation, even of characters unthinkable as they were in this case: hammer, anvil, brain,

cochlea, sound, ear protector – even if these characters have been unusual, which requires significant personal cognitive investment and special group availability, the participants staged and showed dedication in their unexpected role of actors; c) clearly understood the necessary message; d) memorized the content more strongly than if they had received only the verbal message about the importance of using ear protectors; e) significantly increased the chance of changing their previous behavior. What is experienced, although in a climate of *as if*, therefore of relaxation, is easily recorded in the cognitive, affective and corporal memories. Shirahige and Baptista (2003) argue: “Relaxation and involvement are great allies for the memorization and integration of different contents” (p. 176).

Moreno (1975) stated that in body movement, several groups of muscles are put into action, and that the mind is indirectly stimulated toward certain emotional states. The author still remembers the subject of biology in the course of High School for more than 40 years, when the teacher suggested in one of the classes that the human body is made up of DNA molecules, after its didactic verbal exposition. Until today the memory of this class is strong and is discussed with affection in meetings with colleagues of that group, and the students will live with these memories for a life time. Cognitive states are associated with affective memory model learning that propagates over time in an atmosphere of pleasant personal and group recollection. They remember together, they long for that time and the content of that class, with special affection for this professional who, frequently, used original tools to teach their subject.

Any human activity can be transformed into a game, for the purposes of fun, competition, demonstration or living. Explanations, reflections or teachings can be transmitted formally or through a game of characters. This form places the participants in the active position, or because they are literally called upon to act in the role of actors, giving life to characters within the Dramatic Context, or because they are stimulated to think of the situations of an unprecedented *place* of autonomy and criticism. Participants in these conditions are more comfortable to take actions and express questions that expand the field of understanding, because they are stimulated to reflect on unpublished aspects that a theme awakens. An expressive resource such as dramatization, collage, recycling material, drawing, clay, among others, facilitate the exteriorization of new ideas and creative responses. Shirahige and Baptista (2003) state: “these are resources that facilitate the learner self-expression and, when linked to certain contents, reveal the student's understanding and intellectual organization and allow the identification of errors and ways of working with them” (p. 176).

Considering the typical steps of a psychodramatic encounter (Warm up, Roleplaying, Sharing and Comments), we value the latter a lot. This is because it is the moment where people will take some emotional distance from what they have just experienced and share, to reflect on all this content, to perceive new and possible reactions and to generalize their daily life in the Social Context. Here the moment of awareness of what has been learned and the expansion for personal and relational growth is characterized. One participant of a Public Act announced to the others that he represented a very aggressive personage in certain scene, because “*it drained his repressed personal anger*”. He acted in this dramatic way so that he would not attack his private life. He ended by saying something like “here I know I can, it is a protected place, because it is theatrical . . . outside I would suffer consequences and punishments”. It is an exemplary illustration of the acting out that Moreno valued and translated as an act of dramatizing to dedramatize. The open expression in Dramatic Context enabled the event to be catharsis and the actor's contact with the very force of emotion, which J. L. Moreno (1975) called the insight of action. In the Group Context, Sharing phase, other reports show the repercussion of this expression on them and give references to the actor. With some emotional detachment at the Comment stage, the desired awareness of the expression parameters in Social Context environments can be modulated according to the moment, situation or people involved. In this case, some advisable level of containment and adequacy of this actor in the expression

of the same emotion in their groups of social and/or affective coexistence, will facilitate their interpersonal relationships and the adequacy of their responses to different challenges. The notion of the rules that modulate each Context, acceptance and submission to them, which the actor in question showed to know well, is an important indicator of learning and respect to the basic laws of coexistence in the society. In the words of Anzieu (1962, quoted by Fernandez, 2001): “It is not enough for the subject to express himself; it is necessary that it falls apart. An activity of the first type (expressive one) produces relief. Only an activity of the second type allows one to transform . . .” (p. 25).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Learning is a natural process that occurs with one's own life, if there are no emotional or environmental impediments to the learner. One always learns and at all times through different paths, from the structured and systematized ones with objectives quite defined *a priori* to the informal ones, knowledge that is constructed in the daily life. It is learned through people, events, readings, lessons, interlocutions, various experiences, chance.

The contents learned are of several orders: cognitive, affective, ethical, relational, social and they integrate into the life of a person consciously or unconsciously. One of the strengths of Psychodrama is to facilitate, encourage and broaden these paths and make learning more agile, conscious, agreeable, memorable, integrated, cognitive and affective. Psychodramatic methodology, group meetings and the possibility of maintaining a low-tension environment often disarrange the participants, who become involved and become more creative and receptive to new experiences. Certain boldness can be created to try and test unprecedented responses to a variety of situations. Almost everyday reaction format to complex models of behavior can be questioned, modified or appropriated through psychodramatic resources. The group experience allows the diversity of looks regarding the same phenomenon or possible responses, configuring movements of discovery, reflection and transformation.

The set of methods and techniques of Psychodrama is vast. The number of Psychodramatic Games already created and tested by different professionals is great and success with the use of these games is unquestionable. The playfulness and versatility of the Games ensure a fertile environment for the creativity, autonomy and reflection of participants who in their essence are Spontaneous Beings. The Moreno proposal, which makes the task of group meetings very stimulating, is that, regardless of the use, adjustments and adaptations of known resources, each group coordinator will continue to invent new formats and possibilities. In addition to contributing to the Culture of a community, for every Human Being, creating is a way of feeling in movement, with pulsating and productive life force.

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