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Psychodrama in Teacher Education

Being tuned psychodramatically in a classroom context can be understood as having the ability to act empathetically on both emotional and cognitive terms. This paper reports on a research project in psychodrama currently underway in the M-teach program in Sydney University. The process was designed in two parts for a group of students undertaking options in psychodrama as part of their course:

1. Practicing the basic tools of psychodrama.
2. Using psychodramatic methods in simulations of classroom conflict.

As a result of the experience, students reported significant improvement in reflecting and performing the variety of roles needed as a teacher. The workshops combine group and individual activities and emphasize on Psychodramatic tools including Role reversal, Soliloquy, Double and Encounter. The students reported that the acquisition and application of Psychodramatic tools directly to the classroom context added a new dimension to teaching. Students in the research groups reported a bonding and deep interpersonal contacts created through action within the group, a reduction in anxiety toward their first practice teaching experience and a potential for a better teacher pupil rapport. In addition they anticipated they would teach more imaginatively.

Dexterity in the use of empathy in action in resolving conflict can widen the boundaries in teacher student relationships, bring both to a better understanding of their motivations and of spontaneous reactions and create alternatives of action and new insights.

The research development process started with two groups of 12 Mteach students year 1& 2. They were offered a general introduction course to psychodrama, while the 3rd group joined a psychodrama course converted to classroom context. A clear boundary was set between therapy and the use of psychodrama as enriching education. The border between therapy and the educational use of the psychodramatic tool was clearly defined in theory and in the active training. For that reason, four specific tools were chosen to be used in the research field. These psychodramatic tools were **role reversal, double, soliloquy, encounter**. The action was directed to remain in the "here and now" enactment. There was only one focus at a time and the activities were limited to the range of *'me as a student - to me as a teacher*. The participants and the director shared a reflective journal after each session. The notion that a researcher who is also functioning as a teacher and a director will **share** emotions and cognitive reflections with the students, is raising the dilemma of **authority** and teaching and the knowledge base of the teacher. Regarding **Student center pedagogy** we have got the notion that the power we share (to a certain extent) as the students are engaging in **Processing** the course, would empower the interactions and the research goals. While writing this paper most data is yet to be analyzed. It's been reported through the student's journals, questionnaires and interviews that psychodrama was a significant experience for the participants who claimed not to have any preparation toward the performance and the representation aspects of teaching. 17 students in group 3

have just finished their teaching practice experience while they joined the course. Concerning the practical aspects in teaching and problems that came clear through the students' Prac. most of the participants reported difficulties in creating a positive environment in their teaching experiences previous to their course in psychodrama. Lack of knowledge in dealing with behavioral conflicts in the classroom and discovering a big gap between curricular knowledge and the needs of the teaching task were claimed to become major issues in all three groups.

As a result of the psychodrama training it has been reported that students discovered a large scale of roles needed to be used in a classroom situation, a better ability to shift between those roles, greater confident in confronting parents and colleagues, an application of teaching tools to be used in order to facilitate emotional identification of their students toward the curricular task.

Prac. (students' quotes)

H, 'I felt I knew nothing when I was at Prac. I felt like there is this all world of knowledge that I've got to learn... you can be a really bad teacher, on the other side you can be really good one...I don't want to be lazy and just teach. I like to be a good teacher, but I 'm afraid I can be a bad one, it's so easy to be a bad teacher and to survive it'

Y, It's a lot of work to be a real good teacher, some times I feel I can just be a lazy bum

The way (in Uni.) they teach us her, they teach us real positive, and out there you hear a negative comment, it's like an alarm.

W, I think the most worthwhile in this program is the Prac, there you really see what is it all about!'

P, That's the most frustrating thing, because I went to that Prac. and the teaching I did in that Prac. I felt I would have done at the beginning of the year before I have done any of the Mteach work.

Z, 'In my Prac. I've heard that a teacher said to her student "Oh, that's stupid!'

M, 'Can I give you an example, when I was on Prac. with year 11 students, I was doing sculptures, **one girl sculptured a baby that had hanged itself**, I just thought, maybe there is something there that I should know about! And what is my responsibility?'

O, When I was doing Prac. in year 8 There was one girl that was in school couple of days out of the four weeks I have been there. She was just scared of the place... She just hated going to school, I don't think anyone done anything about it....

Study case

D = Director, P = Parent, S = Student, T = Teacher

Exercise / The girl is absent form school - (based on Prac. experience).

O, I saw her just for two times, but if you try to involve she will get more frightened.

R, Does she see someone about this? No, I don't know? **M**, Perhaps through her parents you can find something? (450/b)

Get into the roles

D, Can some body take the role of her parents and the teacher's role?

D, Teacher, tell us about that student, describe her?

T describes the girl (age 12-13), She is always **looking down**, she doesn't like contact(466/b)xx she can't focus on one thing.

W, What sort of relationships she has with her parents? **T**, No idea! **D**, imagine what could be the relationships according to the information you've got here.

The double role

E, Maybe you got a lot of children to take care of and you simply have no time to give her any attention? **Y**, Maybe she is your only child you only try to protect her... has no idea of what is going on?

D, Try to warm the mother up to her role, Mom, your daughter is not going to school, the teacher is going to call you now!

Teacher, I'm actually concerned for her, did you realized your daughter has not been to school?

W-The Mother role' it's impossible for me to act that role! I would never behave like that as a mother!!!

(490/a-545/b) For a few minutes the group was facing a difficulty with **W**, who couldn't accept the mother's role as Auxiliary, and couldn't act a role in which she as a mother not having any idea of her daughter's being absent from school for a month! As a director I will not push someone to be in a role, once I realized that there are personal issues involved, I will check with **W** next week if she is ok about it and if she is willing to share something with the group. The group's reaction toward **W** was quite aggressive

(quotes xx Sodi)

Another volunteer acts the role

T (teacher), Mss. Jacobson, I'm ringing regarding to your daughter not being at school recently, I hope you can inform me why she hasn't been there?

(000-020/c) **T** is very clear, her role is to inform the absence and to try checking what is going on with the parents. **P** (parents) both have no idea, they seems misinformed and disconnected from any emotional aspect relating to their daughter's absence. **T** is doing what she ought to, the role of **responsibility**. **D**, In reality that's what it is all about, the next chapter of this drama can be going beyond the classroom context. We may ask **T** if she has any hesitations, doubts or hints that came through the talks she had with those ignorant **P**.

Reflections -The girl is absent from school (based on Prac. experience)

(28/C) The importance of this spontaneous activity is to frame the boundaries of Teacher - Parents involvement. In analyzing Parents-Teacher context we shall check the trust or distrust between **P- T**. The child benefit is the major argument to **T**'s role. It's important to see what can be the parents next step, in order to get some indication about break through in communication. If there will be no breakthrough we might offer the parents **Surplus reality**, which is an imaginative action that offers alternatives for emotional resolution.

Sharing regarding absences of students

M, '...My school is not selective but it's very conservative, very strict. I got into a lot of troubles last year because I missed a lot of school, so this year I'm very careful.

Parent role, what did your parents do with your absence?

M, They thought that I have a learning disability, so they took me to see a counselor. But I just like to work on my own.

T, I had a boy in year 10, he was hardly at school and couldn't get his school certificate.

He was just afraid of society and school, people...

Second version of T-P concerning absence (based on Prac. experience)

Teacher to Parents, (29/c) 'If he keeps missing so much school I'm afraid he is not going to pass his school certificate, You really have to help me to try and encourage him to come to school '

P, Why should he go to school? He wants to become a mechanic! (**P** had shared with the group earlier in the session, his relationships with his parents concerning **F**'s conflict wishing to be a mechanic. Consciously or not he chose a protective parent!)

T, Well then take him out of school, but you can't have him going and coming as it is, It is just too frustrating for him to be coming and going all the time!

Director, Soliloquy **T**, I feel frustrated. If he doesn't want to be in our school, why is he here?

D, There is a problem here we have no information about what the child really wants to do. I prefer not to see the child role, and to let **P** & **T** continue their roles as we are trying to keep the conflict exactly as **T** faced it in her Prac. **D**, we only have **P** with us, where are we going? **P**, My son works part time and does his training three times a week, we need the money, he helps us! **T**'s double, is your son very happy? **P**, I think so, **T**, I think your child also need his social environment, (The group participates in trying to view the problematic aspects, as teachers are informed by the parents and still view the child as a potential victim of his parents) **T**, I think that issue has more than what **P** said, the student doesn't participate also socially, I think he should see someone, a therapist...(47/c)

T, Maybe you should see a psychotherapist, some counseling for your son? Double for **T**, well this student is an **A** student, I care for him a lot but it seems impossible to try and talk to his parents... **T** accept the double, (the double was by incident **F**, that is having an unfinished business with his Parents). **P** is in a complete denial, the result is again very frustrating. **T** is not sure about the child's desire, **P** is an aggressive person that may effect

the teacher reaction in similar events in the future. This activity still needs an examination of the teacher's approach and roles alternatives and a talk between the teacher and the student - will be acted as an **encounter**.

Teacher exercise 2 Absences are forms of presence

'**The empty chair**'- this chair presents a student that is missing today in the classroom.

If you can double **z x c v** that are not here, come and double them behind the 'empty chair'. You may use information that you have if you think the person like to share that information with the group, but if you have no idea why the person is missing, try to double her/him referring to our classroom context.

Double of **Z**, 'I hope I can pass the course after missing the class'. **D**, why aren't you here today? **Z**, Well I live far, and it's Melbourne cup. Double of **x** 'I'm struggling to motivate myself to participate in the m teach course a lot of the times, often I am presented with being doing something which is not related to the course. . The group is not sure who is exactly **X**. **D** to **X**, can you describe yourself?**X** describes herself. **G**, But I saw you yesterday at Uni. **O**, Are you the one who has a child? **x**doub, no! **O**, you were really tearing me apart in the analysis of my personality even though you don't know me! **P**, Are we supposed to play that for the missing person next week? **D**, Yes, and they will react in the same way you refer to a double-either accept or reject a double(258/b). Double of **M**, ' Me and my friends are going down to the pubs to watch the race today... I'll get a doctor certificate or something...Double of **L**, I'm not here today because there is an Art bar exhibition and I have to work for it today. **J**, 'You are lying! Because you are with your mom doing something...' **D** try to explain to the group that the **empty chair is not a tool to collect hidden information** about why students are not present, but a technique to support the individual and to present them back to the group.

Empty chair Episode

Double of **V**, ' You know I have been here since the first session, and I thought Psychodrama is great, so I talk to a lot of you, personally, and I asked you to come here, well I just recommended the psychodrama to some of you because I thought it's great! Now I feel a little bit responsible, because it's quite complicated and I don't know where it is going. **W**, 'Why do you feel responsible for us? Double of **V**, Well I told you to come...Because the first session was so great! (the group is laughing) and it's not the same! **O**, You told me the assessment was so easy! **W**, look at the graph we drew, my graph went up, don't worry it's our choice, **O**, thanks a lot! (327-334/b **D** bring the issue back to the group).

Reflection of the 'Empty chair' (268-288/b) -some complication in using the empty chair, privacy? tell behind somebody else's back?)

What is common to all the double roles? What if at all is 'The general motivation' of the absent students...

Some people in the group had the feeling that such an activity can be misunderstood by someone who hasn't been in the session and will hear from someone ' Hey we talked about you last week...In order to avoid that see '**How to use the empty chair in a classroom context**'

The goal of this exercise is to interact and confront the classroom with all its students. In regarding the fields of Psychodrama and Group psychotherapy, there is a notion that **absences are forms of a presence**. Absences may be interpreted as a kind of acting out that subconsciously influences the process and the classroom.

The Empty chair presents the classroom interpretation of the reasons for acting out of the group. It does not matter if we are right or wrong, we let the students react to their doubles as they return to the classroom. We will be careful in addressing the doubles to what can help the individual who is not presented, and not to give the group information that might disturb the privacy of the absent person. (Example of the teacher who met a student a week after his father died)

How to use the empty chair in a classroom context

1. Use the technique first in a curricular context.
2. Before using it in a social classroom context remind your students to try and empathize with the absent person, 'Can someone tell us as a double what **X** would like to share with us and she/he couldn't....' The best is to use it when a student is sick for a long time, or away because of external reasons, or if a few students are absent for the same reason.
3. Ask the group to respond back to X. Simple remarks like 'We miss you x, hope you get better' Looking forward to seeing you...' are very important especially with young ones or with rejected students.
4. When responding back to the double, the best is simply to reverse the roll (**Gestalt therapy**) and ask the double to be seated in the chair and respond to the voice of the absent person.
5. Remember to inform the absent student about the activity or to act the roles again when the student is back.

When the teacher is absent - what could be our students' reactions:

Action 1 Classroom's reaction: **Q**, I'm happy because the day will go much faster.

W, I hope something bad happened to him! **D**, who is he? **W**, Mr. FF My Science teacher

He is an asshole! **D**, What's the bad thing you wish for him? Something that will knock him out for a while and won't kill him! **D**, Should he break his leg for instance? or two legs? **W**, yes that's ok. **B**, I'm really stressed now because I need her help, she said she will be here to help me and I don't know what to do! **D**, what are you doing now? **B**, Panicking! **K**, Well my cooking teacher is missing and now we have to do theoretical studies, (384/b) I'm upset because we will not eat the stuff we were supposed to cook!

Action 2 Reverse role, be in the role of the teacher who just heard those reactions concerning her/his absence

Reflection to the absence of the teacher- Data transformed into questions

- How can we as teachers cope with the fact that our students will be so happy with us simply not being at school?
- Would that kind of reaction reduce our motivation?
- Do we simply have to be ready for such a reaction?
- How do we view teaching?
- What is our teaching perception?
- Do we see our job as a mission?

- Do we think of our profession as an ideological duty?
- Do we love teaching enough to survive such a conflict?
- Did we fail in creating an empathetic environment?

If we as teacher are not tuned to ourselves as professionals, we might forget that our students' attitude toward us, is a part of a variety of influences that are related one to the other.

P, But not having school for a day, even though as a child I used to love to go to school, If I'll have a day off from school it will be positive! **G**, I think we should be aware as teachers ourselves that the kids might have this perception of us when we are not there, Can we deal with this perception? **P**, I'll try to think about it in the less personal sense. (420-433/b students may project frustrations, anger and systematic confrontation against any authority figure, it's already planted in the classroom before we step in, sometimes the need to create empathy in action is a condition for our own survival in the conflict.

Sharing

Q, As I was acting the role of the father whose daughter didn't go to school I pretended I knew nothing, but actually I knew she wasn't going, and I felt impotent about it, and I don't think mom knew, I didn't want to tell her.

F (again in a repetitive role that is carried on since her/his drama two weeks ago) Isn't it a typical scenario were dad is too busy earning the money, he just doesn't have the time, he is too busy earning money! Mom takes care of it, whatever, like that sort of thing...

Q, I felt too weak to tell her, I was preoccupied to tell her. (92/c).

H, I Think it's relevant to think about that exercise, because at my work, as an Art teacher in an after school care center, in a primary school. All the kids that are there, are there because their parents are working and those kids are there till six o'clock, so I see every week that kind of experience of parents. It's made me really think about what it is to be a parent if you need to work. Because I grew up when my mom was at home and my father worked, so I didn't have to go to an after school care. What I see is that some of the parents they feel a bit guilty even the kids love it there. It's embarrassing because some of them don't want to go home! It made me think about it, that there can be situations where parents don't know much, and some feel guilty, It is possible that sometimes there will be communications' problems! I can imagine these kind of situations, I've seen a bit of that.

O, (108/C) As a teacher the word frustration hit me! My (xx) hackles got up, I didn't want to discuss the issue with you,

R, If I was that teacher I would have no clue what to do with that student! I probably wouldn't know what to do.

O, I can't tell them that I'm frustrated.

U, I think it's always good to teach in a private school (the group is laughing).

D, No! that's an escape... Please don't run so fast for solutions, stay **frustrated**, this is a powerful theme that appeared today very clearly and that's the warm up. Maybe we need to be there for a while before going to the next phase ---**w o r k** (look at the Emotional Development Diagram week 4.. **work illusions disappointment anger frustrations work**)

U, I think I'll change to the private system.

M, (The group react with anger) Could you simply copout and leave these poor kids to suffer!?

W, What is there in the private system.... **D**, that's not sharing...

F, In a way teaching is sort of looking after everyone's well being, xx(120/c) you might feel a lot against those parents...xx

U, I don't know what I'll do with all those parents (especially in the city) that they don't know the school...xx(131/c)

P, I feel that as a teacher, probably the hardest thing to handle is that not every student in the classroom is going to love me! And I'm not going to have a solution to every child's problem. When you said frustration I felt that straight away, because every year that I'll teach a new class I'm going to find a student that I'm not going to be able to help, and it's eat me bits.. **D**, a student...? **P**, oh! Many students I'm not going to enjoy that at all whether I'm going to teach a private or a public school.

D to **W**, I guess it was very hard for you to have this warm up and not be able to share it with us. **W**, I understand these kids, they are very smart and they can fool their parents the way they want. **D**, So what bothered you? **W**, 'The only reason I didn't want to be in that role is because I couldn't imagine myself ever being in a situation like that, I wouldn't know how to react, or be a sort of parent that doesn't know what is going on with his child. Another thing that is not realistic is, that it's not possible that a child will miss school for two weeks and the parents will not be informed'.

The group disagree, **P**, I've seen it my Prac. it's hard for the school ... There are a few students who think differently. **D**, Do you remember the '**Frustration**' we have all been in the last half an hour, isn't it easier for us all to refer it to you **W**, and make you our **scapegoat**, so we are focusing on **W** not being able to act her role of the irresponsible / misinform parent, rather than being in the conflicting situation as a teacher who faces that type of parents. **W**, I am now in total confusion because, I found it difficult to stay in the role of not knowing if I'm a good parent, or if I know that child is home...I couldn't do it wrongly! (187/c). **D**, Role play is a little bit of losing control over a situation because we are getting into a role as auxiliaries, helping someone to solve something very personal and very subjective for us. **W**, I need to know! **D**, Your daughter Sarah has not been to school for three weeks, you just found out today! **W**, God, I'll be destroyed as a parent.(198/c).

End of action (the absence).

Potential Measurements

A. Correlation (relationships) between

1. I was a good student I'm confident in my ability to become a good teacher.
2. My best subject as a student- the subject I chose to teach.
3. The teacher I recall as positive / that was my favorite- the subject I recall as my favorite.
4. A high / significant / strong warm up / participation in the research group - a positive experience in the last Prac.

B. Spectrogram as a valid measuring tool

C. How many times there was a breakthrough - achieving empathy in action- verses how many events with negative result. (scale of 1-5)

D. The volume / intensity / power / amplification of empathy in action -- the increasing intensity or the improvement of the empathetic quality. **Double** that get a positive signal from the receiver, **Sharing** that contains empathic significant ... compare week 1-3 with week 4-6,

E. Quantify the two kinds of roles the research mainly dealt with, the student verses the teacher. the shift? which of the roles was easier, what types of roles were difficult to act, to deal with?

Exercise: The graph of group emotional development: (091/q)

Sketch on the blackboard the expected graph of the 4th week in our group life

week 1 week 2 week 3 week 4 week 5 week 6

Let everyone do the same in their journal / A4 paper

How does it refer to the dynamic theory of group development? (expectations, illusions, frustrations, anger, disappointment, work, realizations, departing end)

RESULTS

week 1 week 2 week 3 week 4 week 5 week 6

95 82 25 35 55 95

80 70 40 50 60 70

50 63 40 76 78 78

85 20 45 60 65 75

70 60 65 75 85 95

50 35 20 50 70 80

83 78 88 90 95 100

50 60 40 55 55 55

65 75 85 85 85 90

50 60 48 63 80 85



50 45 70 55 60 65

70 70 70 80 -- --

83 68 60 65 63 83

80 65 62 71 69 78

69 average 61 average 54 average 65 average 71 average 81

expectations engagement illusions disappointment denial resistance defenses work illusions
paralyzed work illusions disappointment anger frustrations work insight work realizations
death departure