Individual Psychology and Psychodrama[1]

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Adler frequently deplored the absence of techniques or methods to help the patient understand his own attitudes and goals. He urged us to discover means of drawing our therapy into the emotional and action levels as well as the verbal phase. He suggested pictures and statuettes to make concrete human relations and goals. Thus he hoped to bridge the lag between knowledge and performance.

On these points psychodrama has provided us with invaluable techniques. We Adlerians can use them along the lines of our own professional training without adopting the philosophy of the Dr. Moreno school.

Let me illustrate the use of two techniques.

INITIATING GUIDANCE

Robert, an eleven year old trouble center was always telling others what to do. He was a glib talker with a ready excuse, arguing all the time, and complaining that "everything happened" to him. He had no friends. He was unpleasant to teachers, and he seemed to irritate everyone. His mother was worried over his temper tantrums, his inability to make friends, and his capacity for involving himself in all kinds of difficult situations. He had been like this since the birth of his brother who was six years younger. Very often he stayed at home and played by himself. One day his teacher sent him to me because he had been "insolently defiant." Relieved by the fact that I did not punish him, he became quite friendly, admitted his goal of wanting to be first in his mother's life, and to control others. We agreed that when his father was away he became the man of the family and that his mother then depended on him. He listed numerous ways in which he helped at home. He cheerfully agreed to report at our next session as to how he had made trouble at home and also as to how he might have avoided it.

When he appeared for the second interview he was still pleasant. But when asked how he had gotten along since our last meeting, he frostily informed me, "Don't you think all this is a personal matter?" and then turned sullen. I acknowledged his right to think so and praised his forthrightness.

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As it was evident that these interviews had failed I decided to try psychodrama. Since on several occasions he had offered to dramatize impersonal experiences, role playing was not new to him. About two weeks after our chilly interview, an opportunity arose. Report cards had been distributed, signed by parents, and returned. On one of my daily visits to this class we discussed some purposes of a report card. Then I asked the class, "Did your father and mother see your card?" I received an affirmative reply from all. To the suggestion, "Shall we show what happened last night?" almost everyone agreed, including Robert.

To my question "Who wants to show what happened?" Robert at first appeared a bit uncertain. The feeling disappeared when I asked him to reconstruct the event of yesterday with Robert taking the role of his father. We invited his teacher to act as his mother since he was more happy and comfortable with her than with anyone else in the room. She mothered and understood him. First, Robert described the setting in the kitchen of his home. Then after telling us the names of his parents, he told his teacher what each of them had been doing when the subject of the report card came up and the action began.

Scene I

It is after supper. Robert, taking the role of his father [Bill], is reading the newspaper. Robert enjoys strutting around in his father-role. The teacher, playing the part of his mother [Ann] appears. She shows Robert's report card to "Bill" and says, "He doesn't seem to get along well with other people. And he's even failed in English. What should we do to help him, Bill?"

Robert, flattered at first, starts to comment. Suddenly he stops. He is visibly disturbed. He sits tense and rigid. I halt the action and start another scene.

Scene II

Robert is the assistant principal; his mother visits the assistant principal. In this role Robert is happy. He is very gracious until "mother" asks his opinion of her son. She says, "Robert is really bright. I'm worried. How can we help him?" Robert looks more and more uneasy and becomes sullen. Again we stop the action.

It is customary for pupils with poor reports to visit the principal. Hence we enacted such a visit with the addition of two pupils, one who played the role of Robert's Conscience, and the other that of the

principal. Before Conscience played this role, I warned him against name-calling and specific criticism. His remarks were to be general, such as, "I had to be a wise guy. I had to show off like the rest of the bunch. I should have minded my own business."

Scene III

The principal was gentle and kindly, saying, "Robert, everyone thinks well of you. How come you don't do as well as you can?"

Until that moment Robert had enjoyed playing in the scene. But at this comment from the principal he scowled. Conscience, standing next to him, said, "I had to be a wise guy. It gets me nothing."

Robert angrily turned to Conscience and shouted, "Why don't you mind your own business?" But Conscience, ignoring him like a real conscience, contritely droned, "Always trying to be a big shot. Always thinking of myself."

Robert, irritated and fuming, countered with, "Oh, shut up. I can do my own talking. I can tell my own faults."

At that I recalled him from the play and asked him to sit down and watch. By then he was bubbling over with the things he wanted to say.

Scene IV

The "principal," turning to Robert's Conscience, commented, "Robert, it looks as if you like to have your own way." Conscience answered, "Well, maybe I'm spoiled. I'm always trying to have my own way. Yes, I am spoiled."

Then Robert broke out in a violent temper. Bursting into tears, he turned on us crying, "You've been picking on me for six months."

I quietly replied, "Go on, Robert. This is your chance to say whatever you want."

At this point the unhappy boy screamed and snarled at the performers, "You're a lot of wise guys. That's what you are. You can't talk that way about my mother." (In a private interview he lamely excused his explosion by complaining that calling him "spoiled" was a criticism of his mother.) After hurling a few more insults—with my encouragement— he suddenly became calm and peaceful—perhaps because of this very explosion. Just then the bell rang for an unexpected assembly. We met him downstairs on the way to the auditorium and said, "You certainly can take it. You're all right!" His chest visibly puffed out.

After the auditorium session I met him again and asked whether he would care to help me in the office. He accepted the invitation. After he had finished, we had a pleasant discussion during which he confided his troubles, his problems, and his hopes. It was a most successful interview. We had three more private sessions. For the next two weeks he was a calmer and pleasanter child. Then one day Robert was brought into my office during lunch period by an excited, livid teacher. He had been clowning for the benefit of a newly enrolled girl. This teacher had crisply ordered him to stop "showing off." This led to a fierce exchange. Miss A. complained that he was "impossibly insolent." After she had left, I turned to Robert and congratulated him. I said, "For two weeks you have shown that you can act like a real man. Now, if for the next two weeks you can continue to act like a man, you may come to me and ask for a day off to act like a baby."

Of course there were other lapses, but the successive offenses were milder and the intervals between them longer. Nine weeks later Robert's family moved to another state. It was a quieter, happier Robert who left us and wrote to us every few months.

This special group procedure saved us much time and made it possible to help Robert readjust himself even though we had come to an impasse with the first private interviews.

Practicing Responsibility

Not only is it invaluable in initiating guidance, but psychodrama also provides us with one of the very few techniques for practicing responsibilities—i.e., bridging the gap between knowing and doing. For example, Joseph, a show off of the "intentionally kind" type, helped his mother, not as a responsibility, but chiefly as a bribe to win her preference over his sister. At our suggestion, he selected one girl, Anna, to act as his mother, i.e., as an auxiliary ego.

In the hearing of the class, Joseph described the kitchen of his home. Using pupil seats and blackboard, he located and minutely described the furniture of the kitchen. This may appear unnecessary, but it helped make the situation more real to Joseph and to the class.

Scene I

Joseph comes home. Mother puts him to work dusting. He acts the model child.

Knowing his quarrelsome and untruthful habits, we felt he had presented a rather distorted picture. Hence we asked him, "What's

your sister doing all this time?"

Sneeringly, he answered, "Oh, she reads a book."

Question: "What do you say when you see her reading a book while you're working?"

Answer: "Oh, we fight."

This, we decided, would be the topic of our next session.

Question: "Then, why didn't you show your fight in your play? Do you want to show how nice you are?"

He had helped out of a desire to surpass his sister in his mother's affections and not out of a sense of responsibility. Though his strategy was not of the best, it was better than "pinching the baby" in order to be important.

We again asked Joseph to present a scene at home as it really took place. He selected members from the class to represent his mother, father and sister.

Scene II

Boy comes home from school. He starts to work, notices older sister reading. He orders her to work. In the quarrel, he punches his sister who strikes back. Father scolds them.

Question: "Did you have to fight?"

Answer: "Well, she wouldn't help."

Question: "What else could he have done?"

Answer: (By other pupils) "He should mind his own business. Thinks he's a big shot."

Question: "Joseph, do you think you can tell us what else you could have done besides fight?" A discussion followed along the above lines. Pupils also offered Joseph other solutions.

In this neighborhood, bullying of sisters is not rare. This dramatization gave the girls a chance to express their ideas on a relationship that most brothers took for granted and led to a group discussion of a common troublesome situation.

At the next session we discussed the sibling quarrels that destroy the peace of so many families and then dramatized antagonisms.

Scene I

Joseph comes home. His mother puts him to work polishing furniture. Meanwhile, his sister is reading. He yells to her, "Hey, why can't you do something?" A fight develops that is almost genuine. His parents stop it.

Class comment: "He was wrong. He should mind his own business."

I then said to Joseph, "It seems to me that you helped your mother to show how good you are—not because you feel everybody has to help. Maybe you just wanted to show you are better than your sister." The class was asked, "What else could Joseph have done besides fight with his sister?" They responded, "He could have said nothing. He could have laughed. He could have asked her to help. He should mind his own business. He wants to be a big shot."

I suggested we play this again, but that this time Joseph should try to mind his own business.

Scene II

This time Joseph does mind his own business. His father scolds sister for being idle.

Scene III

Again the play was repeated with another girl taking the part of his sister. Mother gives sister a job when she finds her loafing.

By this time Joseph was controlling himself fairly well under these circumstances. He seemed to be ready for greater strain. I whispered to the actor sister to laugh and sing as she walked past her brother while he was working.

Scene IV

This time Joseph actually loses his temper and begins to beat the impersonator of his sister. A family squabble ensues with father and mother taking part. Meanwhile, the class laughs at Joseph.

Scene V

The play is repeated with one variation. I whisper to the actor sister to tease Joseph. He becomes angry but does not attempt to slap or punch her as in scenes I and IV.

Scene VI

The play is repeated. Joseph maintains self-control, though with great difficulty.

Class comment: "He can't mind his own business. He wants to be the boss. He makes a lot of trouble."

We remarked, "He helps, too, doesn't he?"

Answer: "Yes, like the cow and the milk."

We asked: "How is Joseph better? How is he more like a big boy?"

Then we followed up these sessions with two private interviews in which we discussed the family as a team, and the effects of his quarrels, of his lying and of his selfishness on the welfare of his family. Because catharses and acting out are not enough, verbal formulation and articulate communication must follow. We must relate catharses and experience with cause and purpose.

In reference to the last six scenes in which Joseph was learning to cooperate with his sister, one may ask, "What's the point of all this teasing?"

It has been said that only a fool has to learn through experience. If this is so, then we are all fools—for we learn more through experience than through books, precepts or tailor-made knowledge. In this work, pupils are experiencing their mistakes and then practicing better answers to life conditions. They are not merely acting. They are actually going through (future) personal situations. "Conduct in life is irrevocable; but here every phase of performance is open to correction through criticism made by other participants" (in this case, "parents" and "sister" of Joseph, the instructor, and the subject himself). Things a boy would not tell to a teacher, he will tell in these plays—"and the humor of it may heal many potential grievances and conflicts." — "The subject is trained through acting in the simplest of roles in any specific situation pattern through various degrees of differentiation of the same situation pattern until he can command the pattern adequately; he trains also in many different situation patterns."[1]

This practice becomes a bridge to overcoming future situations. By means of this bridge, the intensity and welter of emotions that an immediate situation would arouse are reduced—for the risks are not so great.

In order to give service *for* and not merely *to* those who come to us, I believe therapists should understand not only various schools of psychology, but also sociology, different cultures and religions. Then, ideally speaking, a psychiatrist would approach his patient as a fellow mistake-maker—and in the process of interrelationship each or both might continue to mature.

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[1] Moreno, J. L., M.D. *Who Shall Survive,* Nervous & Mental Disease Publishing Co., 1934. Quotations and summary, pp. 325 and 327.