

The Link between Creativity and Work with Diverse Groups: A Psychodramatic Perspective

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The need for multi-cultural awareness becomes more pronounced as individual mobility grows, foreign travel increases, economies become more global, day-to-day information flow widens, and migration patterns include greater ethnic diversity (Sowell 1996, McGoldrick, Pearce & Giordano, 1996). If literature for mental health professionals on this subject is a relatively recent phenomenon spanning just the last several decades, the creator of Action Methods (Sociometry, Psychodrama and Group Psychotherapy) focused on “others”—foreigners, disenfranchised and oppressed groups—already during the first decades of the twentieth century (Blatner 1996, Blatner 2000, Marineau 1989). When he was a medical student in Vienna, J. L. Moreno, along with a group of friends, opened a house for homeless people and refugees from other countries. Viewing the mission of sociometry as ambitious and far reaching as possible, he wrote: “A truly therapeutic procedure cannot have less an objective than the whole of mankind” (Moreno, 1953 p.1).

Moreno’s devotion to working with groups was a departure from prevailing psychoanalytic thoughts that were gaining ground. Around 1908, Moreno spent many afternoons in the Augarten, a park in Vienna. He watched the children at play and was fascinated by their sense of freedom, their ability to be imaginative and resolve conflicts “in the moment”. He began to formulate his ideas about the importance of spontaneity and its relationship to creativity. He saw how the children warmed up to the activity, and played different roles with each other. As he told them stories and played games with them, he was

fascinated by the lack of barriers to their spontaneity. He began to formulate his own theories about the connection between spontaneity and creativity. He named their readiness to move into action “warming up.” He saw how the interaction between these three elements produced a finished product he called a “cultural conserve.” Moreno named this entire process *The Canon of Creativity*. It became the central focus of his theory and philosophy of psychodrama. “Children were my models whenever I tried to envision a new order of things or to create a new form...I knew how distorted our institutions had become and I had a new model ready to replace the old: the model of spontaneity and creativity learned from being close to the children.” (Moreno, 1985 p.34)

In 1913 Moreno worked with one of the most stigmatized groups: prostitutes in Vienna’s red light district. Appalled by their harassment by others, including the police, Moreno was concerned about their health, both physical and emotional. They were afraid to seek treatment and internalized the negative images bestowed on them. Moreno visited their homes together with a doctor specializing in venereal diseases and a journalist and held weekly meetings. “These visits,” he wrote (Moreno, 1953, p. xxviii), “were not motivated by the desire to ‘reform’ the girls or to ‘analyze’ them.” Moreno sought to help them gain a sense of dignity “because the prostitutes had been stigmatized as despicable sinners and unworthy people for so long in our civilization that they have come to accept this as an unalterable fact [...] They first noticed superficial results, for example, we were able to get a lawyer for them to represent them in court, a doctor to treat them and a hospital to admit them. But gradually they recognized the deeper value of the meetings, that they could help each other.” These meetings may be viewed today as the first group therapy effort, facilitating group support and leading them to improve their self-esteem and overall well-being. He challenged them to be creative and work together to develop new roles to cope with the ways in which they were viewed by society.

Moreno believed that the key to mental health was the ability to be creative. He felt that by warming up to a situation we could access our spontaneity, unblock creativity and develop new roles or transform old roles to cope with situations. He felt that the healthiest person was the one with the largest role repertoire, and that access to spontaneity and creativity were essential to the development of roles. The more roles we have access to, the more flexibility we have. The more flexibility we have, the more options we can turn to.

Moreno continued to work with diverse groups of people outside of the norm. Early explorations in sociometry, the study of group structure and interaction, were conducted when Moreno was assigned to work with repatriated WWI refugees in Mittendorf, Austria, (1915-1918), first as advanced medical student and later as a young doctor (Marineau, 1989). Thousands of South Tyrol residents had to leave their homes because of the invasion of their territory by the Italians. They were temporarily assigned in barracks each accommodating hundreds of people. Many problems erupted among the refugees because no effort had been made to take into consideration affinities of religion, lifestyle, or social status. Moreno drew up plans to change that and place people according to some order of preferences and affiliations, thus respecting differences and diversity and reducing tensions among various groups.

Moreno immigrated to the United States in 1925 and continued his work developing his ideas of spontaneity and creativity while refining Action Method techniques. In his time-honored tradition to help groups neglected by other professionals, he worked with inmates in Sing-Sing prison in New York State. Together with Helen Jennings, Moreno conducted a sociometric research among the inmates looking to enhance the rehabilitation process and create a better community. Moreno also stated then that by exploring individual situations within the group one could find answers to psychological problems. In 1932 Moreno presented his findings to The American Psychiatric Association's conference and declared, for the first time, that Group Psychotherapy was a valid treatment modality. His pioneering work was harshly criticized by the analytically oriented establishment, which until then maintained that the only way to work on psychological problems was through individual analysis in the doctor's office. Not only was Moreno a visionary, he also worked with population groups that the traditional methods had ignored.

Another marginalized group that mental health professional seemed to have avoided became the focus of Moreno's work and research: "delinquent" and runaway girls at the New York State Training School for Girls in Hudson, NY (1932-1934). In this setting he expanded his work to study principles of spontaneity and interpersonal relationships. He designed tests to study the girls' preferences in roommates, playmates and leaders. Simultaneously, he asked group leaders to choose the girls they thought they could best work with and compiled the data into sociograms. Moreno went further and used role-plays and psychodrama in this institution to help the girls change attitudes and behaviors. In an unexpected way, working with this group that had been overlooked by others, served not only to empower the girls but also became a setting for pioneering work to develop Action Methods further.

These are a few of the diverse groups with whom Moreno worked and studied. His approach was egalitarian and life enhancing. He believed in the potential of all people to find and use their own creativity. And because Action Methods do not rely on verbal or intellectual tools for self-expression, they are aptly suitable to a wide variety of groups. His numerous techniques (Kellermann, 1992) transcend cultural and personal barriers and help people achieve desired changes on all levels: cognitive, emotional and behavioral. His theories of spontaneity and creativity are universal.

In his theory of *the canon of creativity*, the warming up process is concrete and tangible. It reveals itself in every expression of a person, as he/she strives towards the manifestation of a creative act. It has somatic, psychological, and social expression. Warming up to a spontaneous state leads up to, and is aimed at, highly organized patterns of conduct, a creative action. Spontaneity, by Moreno's definition: an adequate response to a new situation and/or a novel response to an old situation, is a general condition existing before and in the course of any creative act, generated through the warming-up process. The warming-up process is not always on a smooth road to the creative act; it is full of obstacles.

Spontaneity operates in the "here and now", it is un-conservable. Spontaneity operates like a catalyst functioning only in the moment of its emergence. It must emerge to be spent. Without spontaneity, the creativity of the universe could not run. It would stand still. A universe, which is open, is favorable for spontaneity to emerge and develop. A response to a novel situation requires a sense of timing, an imagination for appropriateness, an originality of action in each situation.

Spontaneity and Creativity are not identical or similar processes. They are linked together. Creativity is related to the "act" itself, whereas spontaneity is related to the readiness of the act. The world is made up of infinite creativity. Spontaneity allows the creative person to take full command of his/her inner resources. It enters the creatively endowed individual and evokes a response. The resulting product of the working together of spontaneity and creativity is what Moreno called a cultural conserve.

When a person is blocked, they have all their creative gifts but no spontaneity to help the creativity to emerge. They suffer from a deficiency in their warming-up process. They get stuck in cultural conserves. Creativity without spontaneity becomes lifeless, people become anxious and shut down. They cannot respond to the challenges that they meet.

Cultural conserves underlie all forms of creative activity and determine our creative expression. Struggles with cultural conserves are characteristic of our whole culture. They are expressed in various forms. Spontaneous / Creative process is the matrix and the initial stage of any cultural conserve. All forms of spontaneity are linked to creativity. All forms of the cultural conserve are linked to spontaneity. They exist together (Moreno, 1959).

In expanding our ability to be creative we look to our role repertoires. Moreno defined Role as the actual and tangible form, which the self takes. (Moreno, 1946) He believed that the self emerges from the roles we have in our role repertoires. Therefore when we feel stuck, lacking in creativity or stymied by a situation we need to change our roles, access our spontaneity and warm-up to a different way of being.

A role is a complex set of attitudes, beliefs, expectations and skills that make up units of behavior. Roles are learned. They can be revised, retired, re-negotiated, transformed, expanded and retired. Moreno knew that the key to working with diverse populations was to expand our role repertoires as group leaders while helping people to expand theirs. By tapping into our spontaneity we can be creative and find ways to develop new roles for healthy interaction.

Most roles have a social contract. They require others to respond in a particular way. In order to exist, they need reciprocal roles. We have multiple roles in life. No single role defines us. The self emerges from the complex of roles. Moreno believed that we have the capacity to become more conscious and creative in the way we play our roles, and in the roles we choose to utilize in specific situations.

These formulations about spontaneity, creativity and diversity were not left in theoretical sphere only. Moreno spent a lifetime developing numerous techniques to enhance spontaneity among group members and lead them toward creativity. As we study and work with Action Method we realized the infinite potential of further developing his work. Noting that Moreno's contribution has been directly linked to his work with diverse groups, we sought to demonstrate the wide range of applications of Action Methods to various groups and other theoretical models (Gershoni, 2003).

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