

Psychodrama as an Interactive Method to Improve Teacher Candidates' Problem-solving Skill

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to use psychodrama techniques for teacher candidates to improve their problem-solving skills in teaching and classroom management in the first years of their profession and prepare them for future pedagogical challenges. For this purpose, an eight-week in-service teacher training workshop was designed to promote teacher candidates' cognition and creativity in decision making in problematic classroom situations through role playing, role reversal, doubling and mirroring. The impact of these psychodrama techniques on problem-solving skills was then evaluated through interview and reflection. The results proved that psychodrama had a marked positive impact on the problem-solving skills of participant teachers and their critical thinking as well as self-management that allows for resolution through action. Novice teachers had better go through workshops on psychodrama in order to bring about positive and impactful results in their professional development and creating rapport in the classroom, which would go a long way in effective and productive teaching

Keywords

Psychodrama, Problem-solving skill, Role reversal, Doubling, Mirroring

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Introduction

Teaching has been getting more and more complicated because of the changing nature of the world. Teachers face with many increasing challenges especially in the first years of teaching. Teaching is a practical activity and teachers have so many different roles to fulfill. There are times when teachers in particular have difficulty in finding out how to behave in certain situations. Major challenges that novice teachers face can be summarized as follows: the need to establish authority, build a good rapport, motivate students, deal with individual differences, difficulties in aligning instructional techniques to the subject content, evaluation and variety of problems, many of which are all too common occurrences, leading to inappropriate instructional preparation, decrease in student achievement, and the absence of effective communication that are more likely to occur in the first years of teaching experience because of the lack of knowledge and skill.

Along with the changing nature of the world, teaching methods also need to be evolved. For most EFL learners, it is very boring just to sit, look at the board, listen to the teacher, take notes and do homework. Unlike traditional methods of teaching a foreign language, activities that involve students in learning appear to be more effective rather than passive learning. A key motivator in language learning for students is the sense of interest, not only in language itself but in the method used. The most commonly used method that teachers employ in language classes is teaching grammar, some vocabularies, conversations to memorize, role playing, reading a passage and translating it or asking some comprehension questions that are traditional educational policies in teaching a language and aren't tailored to the individual learner. This type of teaching is not without value, but making use of variety of teaching methods and techniques considering learners' need and their differences are more useful for them. Accordingly, the ability to make an impulsive and efficient decision in some

challenging situations is one of the fundamental competencies that teachers need to possess. The essence of problem-solving in teaching is, first of all, to acquire methods of gaining new knowledge independently based on application of existing knowledge and skills. Thus, it is quite logical that this approach is particularly productive in teaching foreign languages. In order to fulfill their roles professionally, teachers need to be competent in their responsibilities towards their student behavior and their learning procedure. They need to have enough knowledge about existing methods, techniques and strategies so that they can alleviate any type of student misbehavior and learning problems they might have. Psychodrama techniques mainly aim at developing cognitive and real-life problem-solving skills that are essential for teaching practice.

The ability to step out of the situation and looking at their relationship with the students from outside is needed in case of a problem in order that the teacher can promote an effective learning. The techniques of psychodrama can provide the candidate teachers with the opportunity to dramatize the situation and develop their awareness of themselves and the system in which they discover themselves, and move towards living more in accordance with their own values and vision as well as getting others' attitude of the situation to overcome the challenge without anxiety. Psychodrama is a science of interpersonal relations. It helps people become aware of their own ways of establishing relations with others, offers alternative ways of approaching the problems in interpersonal relations, provides them with an opportunity to see and judge their own reaction to the situation from outside by dramatizing it and see how others react to it, causing a collaborative, teamwork approach in the delivery of student problems.

An important consideration for teachers is that motivation makes a real difference in learner development; hence teachers need to improve higher order thinking to be able to decide to behave students appropriately, motivate them to engage in learning task and provide them with a supportive

and stress-free learning environment which contributes to their achievement. For this purpose, the author decided to plan a workshop to help the teacher candidates to improve problem-solving skills in teaching foreign language and motivate them to teach in a way that encourages all students to cooperate with each other, experiencing excitement in their own ability to learn. Psychodrama and Sociodrama, as stated by Blatner (2009), are aimed at solving real problems in the real world. Furthermore, the author believes that role playing, derived from psychodrama, is more compatible for educational purposes. Still, it is true that most of the techniques from psychodrama can be modified and applied in role playing.

Consequently, this paper has two objectives. First, it discusses the importance of psychodrama techniques. The second one is to investigate the impact of psychodrama program on improving teacher candidates' problem-solving skills by using psychodrama techniques such as: role playing, role reversal, doubling and mirroring in an in-service teacher training program. One of the challenges for teachers should be to keep every student motivated regarding the learner difference, leading to student achievement in learning a foreign language. Psychodrama can be very useful to help teachers accomplish this task and help them to improve their mental ability to imagine the situation and make an abrupt decision to behave the way doesn't demotivate learners.

1.1. Historical overview of Psychodrama

Psychodrama was conceived and developed by J. L. Moreno (1889-1974), a physician at the turn of the 20th century in 1921 and one of the founders of group psychotherapy. Several experiences influenced him and laid the foundation for the development of psychodrama. From his existential philosophy, working with children and refugees and his interest in theatre, Moreno developed a way of using dramatic re-enactment and other action methods to help people activate their innate abilities to solve their own problems (Chimera and Baim, 2010 p. 2). He initially called this 'spontaneity or creativity training.' Psychodrama encourages the spontaneity and creativity of clients for therapeutic purposes. Originating in J. L. Moreno's work, psychodrama is "the science which explores the 'truth' by dramatic methods" (1972, p.7). Blatner (2007, p.7 as quoted in Chimera and Bain, 2010) also points out:

"It also has a broader meaning, acting as a metonymic key word for a greater field which encompasses aspects of role theory, the theory of creativity, and the methods of sociodrama, sociometry, improvisational drama, and their applications in and beyond psychotherapy, including in education, business, community building and so forth".

Chimera and Baim (2010) state: "Psychodrama is a holistic, strengths-based method of psychotherapy in which people are helped to enact and explore situations from their own life- past, present and future" (p. 1). The scenes enacted may be based on specific events in a person's life, their current or past relationships, unresolved situations, desired roles or inner thoughts and conflicts. As a treatment process, as Pramann (2007) believes, psychodrama concerns the way an individual responds to a particular situation by focusing on the individual's behavioral responses, her belief system

about herself or others and the world in which she inhabits, her feelings and the consequences of such a response. Psychodrama requires the subject to dramatize certain events as a spontaneous play on a "stage" in a group setting and through psychodramatic methods, especially those of enactment, replay, mirroring, doubling, role reversal, role playing and role training; these techniques develop the subjects' self-awareness, lifelong learning, creative expression and social skills. Witnessing and participating in each others' personal stories can generate feelings of deep understanding and trust amongst group members. Psychodrama facilitates insight, personal growth, and integration on cognitive, effective, and behavioral levels. It is just as much a method for encouraging emotional containment as it is a method for emotional expression (catharsis).

Stoner (2007) believes that as participants move from 'talking about' into action, opportunities arise to heal the past, clarify the present and imagine the future. Psychodrama can offer a wider perspective on individual and social problems and an opportunity to try out new behaviors. It has very wide applications and has allied disciplines of sociometry (the measurement of group relations) and sociodrama. The psychodramatic method employs guided dramatic action to examine life's problems or emotional issues raised by individuals. Psychodrama offers the opportunity to practice new roles safely, see oneself from outside, gain insight and change. Schützenberger (1970, p. 46), concerning psychodrama segments, points out:

"There is a director, an action area and group members. The director supports groups to explore new solutions to old problems, group members participate in the drama as significant others and share how they personally relate to and can learn from the presenting issue at the end of the session."

Moreno was among the first to recognize the healing power of a group, including the importance of self-help groups, where each person becomes the healing agent of the other without any special training or knowledge other than his or her own experience. Moreno believed that the personality develops out of the roles we have learned rather than personality dictating the roles we play. Hence, in his view, hesitation about directing psychodrama or action methods can be viewed not as timidity or an introverted personality but rather as the result of an undeveloped or underdeveloped role (Pramann, 2007).

After his death, the method of Psychodrama was later developed by Zerka Toeman Moreno- his wife and collaborator- and many other followers. She continued to travel throughout the world to teach and demonstrate psychodrama. She has been especially noted for bringing psychodrama to interested clinicians and educators in Asia, including China, Taiwan and Japan (Chimera and Bain, 2010, p.2). Moreover, Blatner, now a retired psychiatrist, has written and published several books. First there was a compilation of other people's writings about psychodrama in 1968, and then he was encouraged by Moreno to write up his own summary of what he learned, so as to serve as a useful introduction to others. Blatner's book, *Acting-In*, was published in 1996, translated into several languages, and has become one of the better-known texts in the field because of

its relative clarity of presentation.

A decade later, Blatner wrote an intellectual companion to *Acting In* titled *Foundations of Psychodrama*, which delved more deeply into history, theory, and practice, and this, too was first formally published in 1988 and revised and expanded in a 4th edition in 2000. In the early 1980s, Blatner and his wife, Allee, explored applications of psychodramatic methods beyond the context of psychotherapy; that is, how it might be used as a vehicle for (literally) recreation. This culminated in first a monograph (in 1985) and then formal publication of another book (in 1997), *The Art of Play: Helping adults reclaim imagination and spontaneity*. More recently, he edited and had published an anthology, *Interactive and Improvisational Drama: Varieties of Applied Theatre and Performance*.

Moreno emphasized many times the usefulness of psychodrama and sociometry in education, and he left the doors open to the creative applications of his methods in many domains of social life. Drama in education's source was different from Moreno's; its spirit certainly resonated with Moreno's original vision about the potential of spontaneity as a key dynamic in learning and problem-solving (Blatner, 2009, p.94). Most respondents to this program emphasized the need to acquire new innovative and practical methods and games, motivating and engaging techniques, the need to develop self-awareness and teaching/therapeutic skills, the need of regular professional supervision. (www.LondonCentreForPsychodrama.org)

1.2. Review of related studies in Psychodrama

Later in 2007, Morgan and Rinvoluceri (p. 36) in their article titled as "*Doubling - a Psychodrama Technique that has been successfully Transposed to Language Teaching*" examined ways in which a psychodrama technique called, doubling, has been adapted to teaching elementary to advanced ESL students. They, then, suggested that the doubling exercises presented provide middle-depth involvement for students and avoids the triviality of much language work, yet do not trespass too far into the student's intimacy or break the implicit contract of the teaching situation, guilefully transforming it into a therapy contract. Cheung, Dimmer and Walker (2009) conducted a study and explained the way in which role-play and psychodrama are used in an effort to achieve objectives. The use of this method reflects a desire to encourage skills related to "comprehension learning" and "meaning orientation" rather than "rote" learning and "surface" approaches. In conclusion, they state that through the delivery of effective information, students participated in this study progressed in terms of self-learning, critical thinking and problem-solving (p.20).

The study of a psychodrama group (Carbonell & Parteleno-Barehmi, 1999) also found significant improvement in anxiety symptoms in comparison to a control group. The study by Baker (1987 as quoted in Thabet et al., 2008) utilized a Rogerian/humanistic approach and found that anxiety symptoms were reduced by group treatment, but not significantly more than by individual treatment. MacKay and colleagues' (1987 as quoted in Thabet et al., 2008) study of a drama therapy group with no control group found

no significant improvements in anxiety levels, possibly due to the small sample size.

Surprisingly enough, Psychodrama and problem-solving have not been very widely applied towards either teacher training or teaching foreign languages. In this paper, like Cheung et al's assumption and as it is expected from the literature review, we will argue that psychodrama techniques can also encourage creativity and self-awareness in teachers and they can foster their problem-solving skills and critical thinking.

Our current research deals with the following topics:

- I. How can in-service teacher training through Psychodrama techniques help teacher candidates to prepare for pedagogical challenges?
- II. How can it improve candidates' pedagogical problem-solving skill?

Methods

2.1. Participants

The participants of the study included a total of twelve novice teachers (4 male, 8 female) of about 20-35 age from Icon Academy. They were graduated from English Language and Literature, English Translation and Teaching English and three of them were master's degree students in the same field. The participants had no more than three years experience and all voluntarily attended an-eight-week in-service teacher training workshop. The trainers were two experienced university lecturers from ELT department and the author who was in charge of training candidates with psychodrama techniques, not a professional psychodramatist. The program met twice a week with each session lasting approximately 120 minutes with strategy training and practice.

2.2. Data collection

In this study interview technique and reflection were used to collect data and get the participants' feedback about the effectiveness of the psychodrama technique and these types of teacher education programs and to know how these techniques helped them improve their problem-solving skills and the ability to make an impulsive decision in challenging situations without any anxiety. The one to one interview was between 16-28 February 2020.

2.3. Data analysis

Content analysis was used in the analysis of data based on interview and reflection. Every interview lasted around 15 minutes and all interviews were recorded and then transcribed for analyzing. Based on the interview results, content analysis was made and the available data were analyzed and evaluated. The open-ended interview questions were prepared considering the purpose of the study and were reviewed by the other two trainers in terms of scope of the content and clarity.

2.4. Method

The workshop touched upon multiple challenges teachers had faced, some of which are universal among most teachers, such as classroom management, student motivation, teacher-student relations, teachers' knowledge of strategies, ineffective use of material and textbooks, learner evaluation, student behavior, their learning problems and etc as they all discussed in the opening session of the program. The workshop also contained an introduction of psychodrama and the techniques that later during the training sessions, the author presented them all in practice. It also covered sharing and discussion of the solutions to the most common problems the candidate teachers had faced at the early years of teaching experience and dramatizing these challenges. In the sessions, rather than talking about the situations in which they are having trouble in class, they also enacted the situations, tried to determine what the difficulty in the situation is and how the teacher and the students have come to this situation. 32 hours of training workshop aimed to;

1. Help candidate teachers to get to know one another, build group cohesion, encourage support for each other in their work, be conscious about classroom problems and know how to handle them.
2. Introduce psychodrama as an effective and direct form of intervention, professional development, addressing barriers to learning and lack of motivation.
3. Look for ways of getting out of the situation and try out developing different ways of relations with the students and to make quick decisions at the time of a challenge.
4. Experience and gain skills in doubling, role reversal, mirroring and role playing.
5. Adapt specific techniques to working with problematic and unmotivated students and prepare them for a successful learning.

There was a focus on the further integration of theory and practice, problem-solving in the class through teaching the techniques, coaching, special seminars, protocol writing, directing groups and supervised practice. The training sessions were complemented by individual and peer group activities. Psychodrama was conducted with a group of between 3 to 4 teachers per group based on the script the protagonist chooses to play. The session normally started with warm-up exercises. This provided a wide range of techniques and exercises such as *mirror*, *role playing*, *talk show host* etc aimed at getting in touch with internal stories, reducing anxiety, increasing spontaneity and creativity and creating a focus for the session such as group discussion, problem-solving, discovery learning and evoking teachers' past experiences of the present topic.

A number of scenes were enacted, depicting, for example, memories of specific challenges in the classroom, unfinished situations, inner dramas, preparations for feasible risks and challenges, or unrehearsed expressions of mental states in the here and now. These scenes either portrayed real-life situations or were externalizations of inner mental processes of the teachers. In these experiences, participants explored roles that have a significant formative influence on the way we perceive the world and the interpretations we make about one another. Many techniques were employed, such as *role reversal*, *doubling*, *mirroring* and *soliloquy*. A

sample psychodrama teacher training workshop in week 7 was as follows:

There was normally a period of negotiation in which the *director*, necessarily the author, asked a volunteer to perform as a *protagonist* whose story or issue was presented through guided dramatic action by the director to work on a conflict encountered in the class and the emotions attached to it. The director asked the protagonist to pick two partners to represent her role later during the action. In the words of Moreno, the person taking the role of the others is not only feeling but doing. A kind of contract is established in the group that this person is to fill the center of the stage for the next hour and the other group members who assume the roles of significant others in the drama are the *auxiliary egos*. Other group members who witness the drama and who may become involved in auxiliary roles and *doubles* were the *audiences* and the drama were conducted on the *stage*. The scene then began.

The director put three chairs on the stage and asked the protagonist to choose a chair to sit and state her problem in a few sentences to the audiences (soliloquy). She started explaining the dilemma she had faced in the first six months of her teaching experience in a reading class at pre-intermediate level with 14 high school students.

'Their previous teacher whom they liked very much quitted her job mid-year since she had to move to another city. Ignoring the condition, after introducing myself to the class, I started to ask the students their ideas about the topic of the passage that was about "Tips how to be a good employee" as a warm up. Few students participated, most of them tried to hijack the lesson, refused to participate, started to speak Turkish and tried to astray from the topic. It was a pretty tough situation, the students tried to take over the class and started talking about their previous teacher that she taught better, they never got bored in her classes, I tried to keep up teaching and strive to conduct the class with integrity, facing a major dilemma in my mind "whether to ignore that off-task behavior of the students and follow the plan or deviate from it?"' At the meantime, the director asked the protagonist to freely express her feelings and emotions about the situation. She said she is very anxious and couldn't concentrate to go on teaching. Then, the director asked her to change her chair and thought aloud about one side of her dilemma. The protagonist started to think of the time when she ignored the off-task students and based on the lesson plan she had prepared she had to finish unit 6 but they might disrupt the whole class while teaching. The director then asked the protagonist to take the other chair and think about the other side of her dilemma. She though if she tries to make a good relationship with the students, she can better manage the students in the class. The director asked a participant to supplement the role of the protagonist by standing behind her and saying things that the protagonist might want to say (*doubling*). The double said that *'you had better try to have the students motivated and got them involved in the task rather than keeping up with the lesson plan.'* Then, she accepted and said *'I decided to create a more productive and casual environment for the students. But how? She thinks'* The director interrupted her and had her to take the first chair and just listen to the auxiliaries who took the other two roles previously played by the protagonist (*role reversal*) as the two sides of dilemma one

by one and express her feelings and inner voice about each side of dilemma. This process allows the protagonist to experience the scene from the vantage point of other characters in the drama. It also permits the protagonist to observe the self from the vantage point of other characters in the drama. Role reversals typically take place many times during the role play. After that, the director asked the protagonist to choose a participant to imitate her role in the first chair and she just listened to three of the characters playing her role. It gives the protagonist a sense of reflection and how she is acting or reacting in a particular situation (*mirroring*). After mirroring, the director asked the protagonist to express her emotions again. She said she had better find a way to engage the students in the task and try to motivate them first rather than just covering the lesson plan. Then, she took her seat and as a double, the director recommended the protagonist that she could have turned that off-task behavior of the students into opportunity and discussed the "Tips to be a good teacher" to know their expectations about it so that she can have deeper and richer understanding of their insight. Then sharing phase started and the audiences started to discuss the situation (*post-action sharing*). It is a critically important component that gives the individual members of the group an opportunity to empathize with the protagonist by sharing their own thoughts, feelings and experiences with the protagonist. During the action phase in the training sessions, each candidate was given the opportunity to stage, direct, and act out a subjective experience of the teacher. Each candidate was also given the opportunity to create new endings to her story and that of others, in hopes of restoring a sense of personal control to the other candidates. During the final phase of each session, opportunities for discussion and feedback were offered and the teachers challenged to consider how they might use any of those techniques and share their experiences of the dramatization and any feelings it brought up for them. The techniques mentioned here are described in detail in the following sources: Blatner (1996); Blatner and Blatner (1997); Leveton (2001); Moreno (1964); Z. T. Moreno (1959, 1965, 1987); Moreno, Blomkvist and Rutzel (2000) and Kelleman, (1992 as cited in POTENS Project, 2008).

As teachers gained practice and confidence in using these strategies unconsciously and impulsively and after each group was exposed to its respective condition, an informal interview and reflection was administered to the participant teachers.

Results

The actual learning happens only in the "doing." Psychodrama is the simulation method for interpersonal skill learning. When 'role-playing' was used during the training, participants got in touch with resources from their unconscious that deepened their understanding of the situation and then brought it into the group. It is their inner world of images that comes into contact with the challenge's 'empty spaces', filling those situations out in the way appropriate to the moment, presenting the result for objective checking by the group, and finally returning to the text. As in the POTENS Project (2010), it is the person's own *creativity* and *spontaneity*, opens as it is to

transcendence that leads them forward, not the directors' pedagogical purpose or their sober reflective theology. From Moreno's perspective, spontaneity is an adequate response to a new situation or a novel response to an old situation. It should not be thought of as impulsive behavior or as a license to act out; spontaneity involves reflection and gives people the ability to act according to the situation they face. Instead of encountering a new situation with anxiety, spontaneity fosters a sense of being capable of approaching a challenging situation (Monreo, Bolmkvist, & Rutzel, 2000).

According to the content analysis of the interviews and reflections from the teachers, they realized that they not only teach but also inspire and empower. Using psychodrama and dramatizing, teachers can be better prepared in dealing with classroom disruptions and making quick decisions in the learning challenges the students might have. One of the candidates maintained that psychodrama techniques, especially doubling and role reversal, help candidates increase self and other awareness, resolve and manage confidence, discover the underlying issues to which students are responding and identifying motivation to change. It enables them to be more efficient in their job preparing students to successfully learn a foreign language. However, some of the communicational techniques from psychodrama can very profitably be borrowed to be used in teaching as well. The opportunity to interact with other teachers and sharing ideas and experiences provided them with professional knowledge and equipped them with skills and strategies they may need to become effective and productive teachers in their classroom. They also believed that psychodrama gives them opportunities to experience the learning environment they create for the learners and evaluate it from their eyes which allow them to think more deeply about adopting approaches and strategies that will help the learners become motivated. As a result, they can better manage challenges they face in the class because sometimes inappropriate material or strategy use can adversely affect the learner motivation and achievement. They can experience the way students are affected and reflect the student behavior that leads to teachers' perception of their learners. The teacher candidates believed that this training workshop helped them experience to become students in their own classes which contributes to their personal and professional growth.

Theoretical preparation of pre-service training provided more practical approach that can help candidates to transform their theoretical knowledge into their everyday practice. The training emphasized improving candidates' problem-solving skills by analyzing and understanding pedagogical situations.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study focuses on the major application of psychodrama techniques to language teaching; that is, the use of psychodrama to improve teachers' problem-solving skills and applying specific techniques that are designed for this purpose. This was done by designing a training program in psychodrama techniques to enable the teachers to promote self-awareness, self-management, problem-solving and critical thinking.

The interpersonal relationship system within a family, group or culture is often unconscious and can be conserved for generations, restricting the creative potential of everyone concerned. The psychodrama method with its emphasis on creativity and spontaneity can assist the teachers in their work with learners to develop their awareness of themselves as well as others and the system in which they find themselves, and move towards living more in accordance with their own values and vision. The art of psychodrama includes the recognition of a person's private and metaphorical language and the use of multiple perspectives to elicit the subjective experiences of the protagonist, the director and the group members. Psychodrama allows for resolution through action insight rather than talk alone. Through role play, thinking, feeling and behavior emerge simultaneously in an interactive process to allow a fuller picture of what is being carried in the psyche to come into view.

Psychodrama has also been used to good effect with people who have been diagnosed with personality disorders and a wide range of other mental health conditions, including psychosis and indeed any field which significantly involves interpersonal and group dynamics since psychodrama offers a powerful approach to teaching and learning, as well as to training interrelationship skills. It is applied in diverse settings such as mental health, trauma and abuse recovery, counseling, medical training, residential children's homes, social work, schools and universities, prisons and probation, youth and community work, addictions programs, public and voluntary sector agencies, refugee centers, retirement homes, personal development workshops, relationship and marital counseling, community-building, professional training and development, human resources, and business and industry. But in addition, this should be taught in high school, college, professional training, management training, etc. as part of any curriculum of social and emotional learning. Psychodrama can be used in a group or individually for therapy and personal growth.

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