

The work of JL Moreno – Psychodrama.... The father of therapeutic group work and active interventions in group work:

These notes are based on the book: **J.L. Moreno – by A Paul Hare and June Rabson Hare...** This book is published by sage publications and is part of the “Key figures in counselling in psychotherapy series”

Moreno’s work has contributed greatly to TA therapy in practice... as Eric Berne noted in 1970 - he and Perls shared with other active psychotherapists what he described as “The Moreno problem”: The fact that nearly all known active techniques in psychotherapy had already been tried out by Moreno in psychodrama. So it is difficult to come up with an original idea. For those familiar with TA’s approach to psychotherapeutic work then many of the following ideas will be recognised as having being incorporated into our work.

The essence of psychodrama:

1. Experience the situation as vividly as possible.
2. Express unspoken thoughts / feelings
3. Group members become therapeutic agents for their colleagues in the group.
4. Clients are encouraged to be creative in their lives.

Moreno’s Background: He stated himself that he was born on a boat – however there seems like there is some doubt about this – his mother denied it! He was born in Bucharest 18 May 1889...

He described his work as starting as a psycho-dramatist when aged of 4years old - he was God and his friends were God’s angels. He directed them in their play – until one suggested he try flying as well... resulting in a fall and a broken arm! Throughout his work he saw himself in a similar role... he had seen himself as an extra- ordinary person placed on the planet to fulfil an extra- ordinary mission... he lived the rest of his life attempting to do so.

The greatest impact in the psychotherapy world has been his developments in group work – he also sought to develop groups for social interventions and to create a system for understanding social relationships.

He developed a skill in story telling and creating dramas... sitting against trees or in them he attracted children and groups of adults to listen to him telling / creating the life of fairy stories... making the unreal real in the moment of the telling.

When aged 23 he met Freud (1912) – In this encounter he told Freud that he would start where Freud stopped: *“Well Dr Freud; you meet people in the artificial setting of your office I meet them on the street and in their home and in their natural surroundings. You analyse their dreams. I try to give them courage to dream again. I teach people how to play God!”*

1913 – Group work starts – with Prostitutes. After meeting and talking with a prostitute he began to organise a group of friends / colleagues to run group sessions for the prostitutes - aiming to provide them with dignity and respectability – he decided to work therapeutically with them - through mutual support and help. Morneo began to see that one individual could become the therapeutic agent for the other. He also involved other doctors to treat the physical side of their problems.

Moreno described active interventions with other clients - including suicidal a suicidal client in 1919 whom he told that as a doctor his role was to make people feel better – not to help them die... they went on to act out many scenarios – “the tragedies seem to become much lighter”

As Moreno had a Jewish background and therefore had to escape to the USA – where he went on to create various institutes of group work. 1965 and 1969 His partner (Zerka Moreno – herself a leading training and thinker) published 15 rules for psychodrama... these are central to most of our work as group psychotherapists. Today these ideas are accepted as normal – however at the time Moreno was developing them they were truly revolutionary!

15 rules for psychodrama

- 1) Action: The subject (client) acts out their conflict instead of talking about them.
- 2) Here and Now: the client acts out their drama as if it is happening in the moment... Moreno believed that speaking about the past removed the client from the immediacy of the experience... He required – act as if it is happening to you now...
- 3) Subjectivity: the client acts out his / her own truth as he feels / perceives / thinks. “The client must be given the satisfaction of being accepted in their subjectivity prior to retraining / behaviour changes.
- 4) Maximal expression: The client is encouraged to maximise all expression / actions / verbal communication – rather than reducing it.
- 5) Inward movement: The warming up proceeds from the periphery to the centre... that is start with the less interesting “safe experiences” and move towards the more traumatic. The therapist starts with the more superficial and allows the client to carry him deeply towards the core.
- 6) Client choice: the client chooses all aspects of their work...
- 7) Restraint – psychodrama can be about restraint – although not repression!
- 8) Acceptance of non- expressiveness. The client is allowed to be as he is at this time.
- 9) Interpretation: which can be acted out by all involved.
- 10) Action is Primary: even if verbal interpretation is given the action is primary – the client may need emotional identification rather than analysis.
- 11) Cultural adaptations: the important thing is to use appropriate cultural expectations... to know how to begin – although the important thing is not how to begin but that we do begin!
- 12) Three Part Process: the warm up ... the action – the post action sharing by the group.
- 13) Identification with the client... never leave the client believing they are the only one with this kind of problem... use the audience to identify with the client or / and the therapist.
- 14) Role play: the client must learn to take the role of all those he is meaningfully related.
- 15) Flexibility: trust the therapeutic process – the psychodrama is the final arbiter and guide in the therapeutic process. When the therapist (called director in psychodrama) is objective, spontaneous, and available then the psychodrama therapeutic method will lead systematically to the heart of the client’s suffering. The therapist and all in the group become a cohesive force to maximise emotional learning.

Moreno also described various techniques all of which involve the client and the group entering fully into the client’s experience... Two of these techniques seem to be specifically significant to me as they are frequently used by psychotherapists of varying approaches... but rarely credited to Moreno.

- a) Dream Presentation: The client enacts his / her dreams - possibly going on to create new outcomes.
- b) Future projection: Enacting in full a future event...