

***Sociodrama: an active method in research, teaching and educational
intervention***

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Abstract

In this article, the authors present sociodrama as an active method par excellence, as an action and experiential method for teaching, research and service to the community; discuss concepts about groups and group phenomena collected in their research; expose the challenges of the educator as a social therapist; and make theoretical-practical reflections of their interventions in various institutions and knowledge areas. The authors also demonstrate, in a research on the inclusion of blacks in the university, how the emergence of social roles interferes in power relations in the society and explains the need to develop an empathic dialogue; and present how the sociodramatic practice in education enables the management of conflicts and creativity in the social and educational context.

Keywords: sociodrama, groups, education, qualitative research, active method

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When we speak of an active method for teaching, research and service to the community, we also refer to the development of the role of the educator as a social therapist. We are educators who constantly meet when working with groups and individuals. We help people deal with their emotional and power dimensions as we delve deeper into topics that intersect around the being in relationship and knowledge.

As educators-social therapists, we need to learn socio-educational methods that are effective both in the teaching-learning task and in interventions in problem situations in the school, organizational or community environment.

In this article, we will approach sociodrama, a method of action – created by J. L. Moreno (1974) – which is important for the educator to advance in their educational and social practice. The sociodrama seeks, in an experiential way, to increase the creativity of the participants of the group. It is an active method that articulates each person's way of being and thinking with their possibilities of learning and problem solving. In summary, the sociodramatic action takes place in a meeting that contains a continuous warm-up for the interactions and their themes, with the audience and the protagonists, from non-specific warm-up, to dramatization, to the sharing of emotions, contents and experiences and for the theoretical processing of what occurred at the meeting.

In the sociodrama, there is the scenario, which is the space for action, where additional reality facilitates the experience and the creative interactions in the quest for experiential and co-constructed learning; thus, sociodrama is an active method par excellence.

The sociodrama emerges as an experiential method, based on group theories (the sociometry) and is within the sociatry, i.e., group therapy (Moreno, 1972; Nery & Conceição, 2012). In theoretical and epistemological perspective of sociometry, the educator will not only consider the roles of education or of colleagues, but will also look at the people present, to transmit contents and to mediate the relations. The quest is to develop, for example, the collective construction of knowledge, the appreciation of personal and local knowledge, constant and experiential learning, living with diversity, constructive confrontation and empathic dialogue. The role of socio-therapist can be performed by a professional in any field of knowledge, after a specialization in psychodrama.

Sociodrama can be used as an active teaching methodology, in which the student will experience the curricular contents through, for example, scenes, characters, interactions, concrete demonstrations of abstractions. The experiential learning is co-constructive: everyone participates actively and creatively in the educational process. In this learning, there is the promotion of respect for the knowledge and the being of the other, as a unique and singular individual who, with his way of being, will contribute to the group tasks. It seeks the training of professional roles, with the empathic dialogue, the inclusive process. We refer the reader to Chapter 11 of the book “Group Interventions: Psychodrama and its Methods” (Nery & Conceição, 2012).

However, in addition to being a sociodramatic teaching methodology, it is necessary to understand that Freire (1976) presents the “educator” as an intervener or social worker. In this role, the sociodrama tool is an excellent active socio-therapeutic method.

In our socio-therapeutic function, we educators need to recognize and review the dynamics of power, which we reproduce daily with the behaviors learned in our life history and society (Foucault, 2002; Nery, 2014).

Moreno (1974) points out the power relations present in the intergroup affectivity, that is, in the sociometric hierarchy. The exclusion or non-inclusion suffered by certain individuals and groups in society, focusing on human coexistence through relationships of attraction, repulsion or indifference. These are the affective positions of individuals in groups and groups in the society, seen by the science of sociometry.

The constant review of the practice of the socio-therapist is important, since he believes that he is emancipating individuals and groups from their oppressions and inequalities, but in fact, he can be at the service of their marginalization as an effect of power (Popkewitz, 2001).

For Moreno (1974), social roles contain our culture and express our self in human contact. The identity matrix brings us the culture in cultural preserves: ideologies, values and beliefs present at every moment in our relations. Human learning eases the rigidity of identities and their cultural preserves. To this, the author calls it spontaneity-creativity. The process of identification also contributes to the experience of flexibility of identity, as we broaden the contact with the other and have more opportunity to understand their experiences in life. In 2008, we observed the impact of a new role in the identity processes of social groups. We conducted a doctoral research at the University of Brasília (UnB) on the affective interaction between students in a racial inclusion process (Nery, 2008). We conducted sociodramas with the participating groups (at that time “quotaters” – students who entered the university through quotas for blacks – and “non-quotaters” – those who entered through the universal system). We dramatize the scenes and analyze them through information analysis (González-Rey, 2002), searching for indicators, categories and areas of meaning.

One of the scenes analyzed was that of a white student, who did not enter university in her first college entrance examination because of the implantation of affirmative racial politics that year. She became desperate, sad, felt wronged and criticized the quota system. In this scene, the blacks showed their indignation and their fear of discrimination and charges, questioned the critics and pointed out the importance of the system. Other participants, in the role of students or teachers, expressed their feelings, such as disregard and indifference, and attitudes toward or against the system. The scene ends with the black expressing the suffering that they experience when they arrived, some students demonstrating understanding and the white student still with feelings of injustice. Through the sociodrama, we observed that in the racial inclusion process at UnB, the identity process was made explicit so that one of the social groups was highlighted socially: the blacks. The explicitness of identity gives voice to social groups to fight for their rights. The new social roles of “black quota student” and “non-quota student” have produced the experience of radical identity and concealment of identity (Nery, 2008).

The identity that has become radical has spurred aggressive power relations and has been demonstrated in speeches by the white, for example: “everyone is black in Brazil” and “there is no racial exclusion in the country”, or feelings of neglect, anger, indifference to the subject and injustice.

The experience of concealing the identity of the black weakened the political nature, that is, the understanding and political participation of this socially excluded group. This experience can be demonstrated in speeches, for example: “I will not say I went through quotas” and “I will not participate in debates on racial inclusion”, on the part of the blacks or in behaviors of being isolated, to avoid exposing themselves. They also expressed their anxieties and excessive self-doubt of excellent academic performance. The affective processes of anti-empathy or disregard for black suffering in the sociodramatic encounter have advanced to empathy, understanding each other’s realities in the inclusive process, sharing emotions, and beginning the distribution of power.

This research at the University of Brasilia helped us to understand how a new role arises in society and demonstrates what Naffah Neto (1997) has affirmed: social roles are historical, since they reproduce the relations of social conflicts. In our case, they reproduce the typical characteristics of Brazilian racism of silencing the black, distorting history and keeping them excluded from educational access and better positions in the society (Santos, 2007).

We analyze other sociodramas that we perform in educational institutions and public agencies, focusing on power relations, coexistence with differences, mediation of conflicts in

groups, management of problem situations and feared scenes of participants.

At a school in Camboriú, Santa Catarina, in June 2017, we worked on the problem situations of elementary school teachers. We asked the teachers to talk about the most difficult scenes they faced at school. We chose three scenes, and the director asked, in the first scene, that the three auxiliary egos trained in psychodrama played the lead roles. Gradually, the teachers began to enter the scenes, helping the egos to make the characters or playing new characters. One of the worked scenes was the difficulty of a teacher in dealing with the aggressiveness of one of the students. He offended her verbally, offended his colleagues, and disrupted his concentration on tasks. The auxiliary ego made the character according to what was said about the student. As he deepened his intuition about the character, the ego expressed his anguish of wanting to be seen, but they always criticized him, and he also spoke of his suffering at home.

We asked the audience to imagine themselves in his place and asked what he needed. Several people in the audience said, “look at me”, “see that I have capacity” and “consider me”. Some teachers tried strategies to make their care more effective in the face of the student's need to be seen. In addition, the protagonist and some participants of the audience did double (imagining in the place of the protagonist) saying whether that intervention helped him or not.

At one point, the director asked everyone in the scene, students and teachers, to pick up a sheet and imagine something or someone for whom they would very much like to express indignation or anger, and do whatever you want with that sheet. Auxiliary egos helped to express emotions. Seeing everybody expressing anger, the protagonist also expressed his anger, which was against the father who beat and humiliated him. At the end, they all said that he was no longer alone and that everyone else has also suffered some pain.

In the sharing, the participants said that anger can also be a request for help, attention and we usually do not seek to see the meaning of their expression. They also said that we complement each other's anger with anger, punishment, or fear of not responding to the task of that day, and this usually increases tension and conflict. They also spoke of the need to take a moment to take a closer look at what is happening, as this helps to improve relationships.

In this sociodrama, sociometry, until then, was excluded from that which “caused problems”. However, with the rotation of the experience of the characters, with the sharing of emotions and difficulties and with the training of strategies, they broadened the perception of possible solutions to the problem situation.

In these studies, we also find the affective logic of conduct (Nery, 2014), that is, beliefs and the way we have to achieve affection or express frustration by the affection not received in relationships and groups. Pedro (the aggressive student) said, “I do not like you to notice me or give me importance!” and “You do not understand me, so I do not obey!” and his classmates and teachers were irritated, criticized, or assaulted, just as the authoritarian father acted with him. Inasmuch as we understand Pedro, we can give him what he needs, without being in the direct relationship of suffering, but in the creative relationship, where he receives attention and care more adequately.

Another example of institutional intervention occurred in one sector of a public agency. During ten meetings, we worked on the work processes, the sufferings and the relations of power. In one of the meetings, we worked on the exercise of power, warming-up people to think about the difficult moments of the power relations they exercised and those they engaged, as well as the relationships in which they submitted to one's power. We asked them to choose a situation and observe these relationships. Afterwards, the participants commented on the scenes and voted for some to be dramatized. Let's look at the example of the boss of the scene that demanded speed in relation to a job, in an arrogant and authoritarian way.

It was asked that the scenes of the people become scenes of all participants with the recreation of the scripts of the characters by the audience, that is, it would not just be the character of a person who reported it. This procedure contributes to the psychodramatic approach (working the protagonist who cries out for the group) to the sociodrama (the scene is assembled by the whole group, when all expose themselves to a common problem).

The boss's scene was composed of a scenario where a person sat on a chair, playing the boss who, with an authoritarian posture, demanded work, results and criticized them in different ways, and the subordinate who stood, but with looking down, holding her hands nervously, and feeling frightened and threatened. The subordinate tried to say that she had accumulated jobs, that the deadlines were short and that she had no staff to help her. But the boss was not listening. Some people in the audience were asked to stay close to the boss or subordinate to reinforce the characters' speeches. Several people came and were asked to broaden the feelings in the characters.

We made reversals of roles, and the subordinate, instead of the boss, began to say that he acted this out of fear, felt threatened if he did not deliver the work in time for the superior. She also felt oppressed between two places and did not think of how much personal skills this task required to deal with people and with so much pressure. One person from the audience was to play the role of the superior boss and acted in the same way as the immediate boss. The subordinate returned to her role and asked for help to other servants, to argue and expose what happened to her, the suffering, and that everyone was getting sick in the sector. The audience was asked to talk to the characters, express feelings and make proposals.

In the closing remarks, they all exposed how much we are reinforced in the society to exercise power within these threatening functions, to make demands in large part for fear of not giving an account, or with authoritarianism, derived from insecurity.

One person in the audience said he understood a little more about the harassment he suffered, the seductions charged with threats, and the need to ask for help and to impose limits. We made a scene and she expressed her indignation to her boss, she said she was more important than work and decided to leave. Another person did the same scene and recorded a conversation. He told the chief that he will no longer tolerate that harassment, yet he continued, and then she filed an administrative proceeding with her evidence. The audience told the characters their feelings and proposed new strategies on the subject.

The feedback from participants regarding this sociodrama was about the importance of trying to do differently as boss and subordinates, retracing the cultural preserves of authoritarianism, threats, surveillance, task distribution, trust, and respect.

In another meeting, we worked on problem solving and possible alternatives. We use two dramatic games: the "why", which consists of a table in which a problem is placed in one column, the other column why this problem occurs, the other why this is why and two more columns (four columns of why why), and the next column is the one that brings possible solutions, actions and deadlines. The reflection of the problems was intense, just as they were pleased with the proposals never before considered by the members of the sector. We did sociodramas with scenes related to the proposed resolutions, with the training of roles and attitudes for the tasks. Another study was to approach a controversial theme exploring its pros and cons. We put a large brown paper on one side (to put arguments in favor of the theme) and another on the other side (to put arguments against the theme). The audience was warmed-up in two groups, the favoring group and the opposing group, so that people imagined themselves as people who thought with their respective attitudes. Then we ask the subgroups to reverse the roles and rewarm them in feelings and attitudes in this new moment. In favorable and unfavorable characters, they wrote the arguments on the brown papers. Then we ask people to go back to being themselves and look at the distance, think and write conclusions in subgroups.

Also this technique helped the team to review and elaborate new strategies in relation to some subjects of the sector.

Therefore, in sociodrama, the director can use various resources, procedures, and management to assist groups and their subgroups, taking into account the group's history, dynamics, group standards, co-conscious content, and group demand.

This intervention in the sector of the public agency contributed to the joint creation of new answers to old problems that occurred there. It also had repercussions on the agency, since the bosses made more elaborate reports of their needs in the sector for the superior heads, with the objective of improvement in the results and with fewer occupational diseases. We could observe that sociometry has also deepened, with increasing group cohesion and the recognition of the members of the sector.

In Brazil, many research studies use psychodrama or other action methods to analyze the relationships in the phenomena to be studied. For example, Godin (2016) conducted the survey “Pedagogical Psychodrama: Research intervention in students with learning disabilities”, which is an intervention research, in which the psycho-pedagogical work associated with the psychodramatic method allows children to express themselves and perceive them as operative subjects in the middle, being able to transform it in function of their actions. The article by Ferracini (2018) “Qualitative research and psychodrama: developing professionals in teaching and health care” brings the study with masters and undergraduates in the various professions in health, in their academic-professional development.

Vale (2009) presents the research “Contribution of the spontaneous theater in research with young people of a public school”, which is a research on the meanings of the school experience for the young students of EJA – Youth and Adult Education – of a public school in Belo Horizonte. He concludes that spontaneous theater is a method that complements other participatory research procedures, which was perceived by young people as a relevant area of school experience and juvenile subjectivity.

The bibliographic survey by Branco, Farias, Carpes and Leite (2015) is noteworthy, in “Production of articles in Psychodrama in Brazil: systematic review”. We reviewed 98 theoretical articles (96-2014), with hegemony of clinical discussions, the concentration of publications in a journal and wide dissemination of national and foreign affiliations related to the authors who produced articles on psychodrama.

We observed little research in the clinical area and questioned: does anyone who writes in the clinical area identify their production as research? The article by Branco et al. (2018) also pointed out a concentration of texts and research on psychodrama in the *Revista Brasileira de Psicodrama* (Brazilian Journal of Psychodrama), which brings the concern about the necessity of psychodrama if it proves itself as a scientific method of research and becomes more in the academia and in the society.

Nery, Costa and Conceição (2006, p. 305) pointed out that “sociodrama is a method of intervention research that seeks to understand group processes and intervene in one of their problem situations, through the action/communication of people”.

In summary, we observe that the research methods of action, particularly sociodrama, epistemologically brings together, in other words, the researcher is in the context of the research and enters in direct relation with the participants, while preserving their main functions of observer and analyst. Still:

- a. It shows social roles as a unit of research that can be observed.
- b. The methods of action (sociodrama, psychodrama, spontaneous theater and others) also have the function of intervening, bringing the characteristic of the study into intervention research.

c. The “subject” of the research is, in fact, a co-creator and producer of knowledge, so it also has researcher status. It is necessary to observe the importance of the concept of protagonist and its identification and the protagonist themes, in the sociometric and sociodynamic process, combined with the challenge of registers and transcriptions.

d. Psychodrama contemplates stories, beliefs, affections, and exposes this not only by speech, but also by behaviors, postures and group dynamics.

e. Data analysis can be done by combining the analysis of discourse, information, content, and image, but it goes beyond analysis of the scene, dialogues, characters, behaviors and performances in the social, group and dramatic field.

f. The sociodrama opens space and allows other qualitative research methods to be used in the same research, bringing complements of methodologies that are used as a unit in the speech of participants.

g. In addition, as developed in this article, the sociodrama presents itself as a tool to researchers and educators.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In our work as educators, we act as social workers (Freire, 1976). We use various methods to achieve our goals in the teaching-learning process and the empowerment of groups and individuals. We and our methods are embedded in culture, we are cultural artifacts and we run the risk of contributing to the maintenance of the status quo, to reproductive knowledge, without creativity, to collective suffering and to alienation. Therefore, it is fundamental to criticize where our actions are derived and where our cultural, social and educational productions go.

The educator as a social therapist will use sociodrama, an active method, which can favor experiential learning, action research and ethical commitment to academic content. It is a tool that enables the experience of the contents, empathic dialogue and interpersonal and intergroup learning. It helps the educator to become a social intervener that facilitates collective creation and imagination in supplementary reality. In this reality, it helps to relax the identities with the encounter of cultures.

In his utopia, Moreno (1974) bet on us to create ourselves by recreating society and presented the sociodrama in which the expression of self and being with each other are valued. Thus, the invitation is for professionals working with individuals and groups to specialize in this method and to continue the creation that it allows.

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