



Psychotherapy Guidebook



PSYCHOTHEATRICALS



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Psychotheatrics

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Table of Contents

[DEFINITION](#)

[HISTORY](#)

[TECHNIQUE](#)

[APPLICATIONS](#)

Psychotheatrics

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DEFINITION

Psychotheatrics (PT) is a process based on theories and techniques from theater and the practice of psychotherapy. PT is action oriented, focuses on individual responsibility, enhances the discovery of options, and helps the individual create a design for behavior change.

The primary person involved in change (client, student, group member, trainee) functions much like a theater director, directing action or emotional scenes relevant to his needs for change. These may be past, present, or future scenes — real or fantasy. Psychotheatrics may be used as a therapy modality, educational process, theater process, or awareness process. As options for new behavior evolve, the process is structured to provide the primary person with the opportunity for testing them.

HISTORY

Psychotheatrics was originated by Robert D. Allen and developed in conjunction with Nina Krebs at California State University, Sacramento. From

1973 to 1977, extensive research was conducted with PT there; at one time this involved ten mental health clinics and one child-care center, making this study one of the most thorough ever enacted. A three-condition design was used: 1) PT, 2) regular treatment (traditional therapies used in each agency, having a wide range, from Gestalt, Psychodrama, Reality Therapy, to Values Clarification, etc.), and 3) no treatment. Psychotheatrics was found to have a more beneficial impact on clients than the other two conditions in every area of study: alcohol abuse, drug abuse, day treatment, children, interpersonal relationships, and awareness. During this period of time, PT was constantly being refined, resulting in a process that is easily used in a wide variety of settings. In 1976, the Association for Psychotheatrics (AP) was formed to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas among persons interested in PT, to encourage the training of qualified individuals in PT, and to maintain high standards in the training and practice of PT. In line with its purpose, AP has established a registry, a list of registered PT professionals that ensures professional recognition and public protection. The Association is dedicated to the development of PT in the fields of mental health, education, and theater.

TECHNIQUE

PT has been developed in three forms:

Playwright. For work with individuals; usually a one-time event as part of some other process. Individual directs relevant situations and deals with options that emerge.

Spectator. For work with groups of people who have a common variable. May be used as a one-time workshop process or as format for ongoing groups.

Environmental. For work with an individual who has specific behavioral change goals. Occurs in controlled setting with other people who are in the same change process.

Here is a simplified description of the PT process:

1. Primary Person describes a relevant feeling fantasy or real situation.
2. Facilitator helps primary person conceptualize situation for immediate performance.
3. Primary Person directs situation with Facilitator, associates, group members, or available others serving as “players” to act scenes.
4. Primary Person suggests options for change. Facilitator may add to these.
5. Primary Person may direct players through several options.

PT is mainly a way of providing a setting where someone can gain a new degree of objectivity or understanding about whatever process he is in that is of interest or concern. This ability to view oneself at a distance using behavior that was never dreamed possible has high impact. Whatever the PT action phase application, the process can be thought of in three broad steps toward behavior change: 1) the individual observing and understanding his behavior; 2) developing options for more effective behavior; 3) experimenting and assessing newly uncovered options. The three steps toward behavior change parallel the central focus of most action-oriented therapies and educational processes. The PT action phase is designated to shorten the length of time required for major changes to occur. The PT impact — combining the powerful forces of producing, directing, and actualizing — provides a synthesis for the individual that other techniques do not offer in the same way. The integration of producer and director dynamics is reflected by actualizing.

Although dialogue is used as part of all three PT elements, the emphasis is not on words alone. Integration of thoughts, words, movement, and feelings is important. Educationally, this has implications for many people whose strengths are in nonverbal areas often missed in typical academic settings. A deaf workshop participant pointed out that PT has great possibilities for communication and education among people who cannot rely on hearing.

Since PT can be used with individuals (Playwright), groups (Spectator), and individuals in a controlled environment (Environmental), the facilitator, teacher, or lay person has choices about which form would be appropriate for his needs.

APPLICATIONS

Psychotheatrics is a contentless process and is thus adaptable for many purposes in a variety of settings with people of different levels of sophistication. Some areas of usefulness include:

1. In-service training for professionals: empathy training, interpersonal communications, decision-making, diagnosing conflict, perception checking, experimenting with new options.
2. Direct services to students or clients: group process, individual behavior change, defining individual responsibility, teaching skills and concepts.
3. Personal awareness: decision-making, understanding conflict, options development.