

Drama Therapy Exercises

Susana Pendzik, PhD, RDT ©

WARM UPS:

Pair warm-up – embodiment

Playing each other like an instrument

A dialogue with the back

DRAMA THERAPY BASICS

Creating a Play in Pairs

What's in a name?

DRAMATIC RESONANCES

Mirroring Resonance: *Parla! (Speak)*

Universal Resonance: the Nature Metaphor

TRAINING & FACILITATION TECHNIQUES

Entering dramatic reality through the back

Today's Journey

First phase: Practicing active listening

Second phase: Practicing self-awareness

Third phase: Practicing work in dramatic reality

Fourth phase: Processing and evaluation

The judge and the savior

WARM UPS:

Pair warm-up – embodiment

Playing each other like an instrument

Goals:

- To warm up physically by discharging tensions held up in the body.
- To establish trust and generate a sense of intimacy among members.
- To generate body awareness.

Procedure:

- Pairs distribute themselves in space and name each other “A” and “B”;
- “A’s” start as the “instrument” and “B’s” as the “players”.
- “A’s” stand up straight but relaxed, take a deep breath, and begin to exhale producing a uniform, consistent sound (preferable using the vowel “a”). They repeat the sound for three consecutive breaths.
- Meanwhile, “B’s” move “A’s” bodies, swing their limbs, play with their face, shoulders, etc., tapping on various parts of their bodies so as to alter the sound they produce.
- After 3 consecutive breaths, they swap roles; everyone should play at least twice in each role.

Comments:

- The sound should be altered *only* by the player – not by the instrument.
- On the second round, instruct “players” to sense where their “instruments” are holding up tension and try to help them discharge the sound from there.

A dialogue with the back

Goals:

- To break the ice and establish basic trust between group members.
- To elicit a wide range of emotions.
- To warm the group up to issues concerning interpersonal relations.

Procedure

- Pairs stand back to back.
- The facilitator leads them through a dialogue with their backs, in which several feelings are included. For instance: *“Imagine your backs are speaking to each other about trivial, everyday life matters. You exchange ideas, make light jokes about things, share experiences, etc. Eventually, a mild discrepancy between you arises which increases gradually into a discussion. An intense conflict is revealed which turns into an angry argument. You both hold to your positions: It is a matter of principle and you are not willing to give up...! Finally, you realize that it was all a misunderstanding, a big mistake. You just didn’t understand or hear each other properly. Now everything is mended, you explain yourselves to one another, you make up. You’re just two loving, caring human beings...”*
- Members respond to the facilitator’s account of the dialogue only by moving their backs.

DRAMA THERAPY BASICS

Creating a Play in Pairs

Goals:

- To foster creativity and playfulness.
- To develop listening skills and collaborative work.
- To get to know each other the “drama therapy way.”
- To introduce drama therapy techniques and approach.

Procedure

- Group pairs up.
- In turn, participants describe their house to each other. (Pay attention to your partner’s description!)
- Draw a picture of your partner’s house. As this is a subjective interpretation – not an exact map – you may focus on any aspect that caught your attention.
- Exchange drawings with your partner. Take some moments to briefly comment on the process and on the drawing you received.
- Find a place in the room to hang the two drawings together, as if for an art exhibition. Take your time to prepare the display, so as to give it an aesthetic touch.
- Leave a blank piece of paper and a pencil at the side of your piece.
- The group goes out of the room, and members are instructed to re-enter the space, as if they were visiting a museum.

- Pairs walk around the room, looking at the houses exhibited, and leave brief suggestions about “who (what characters) live in this houses?” (For example, a French teacher, a secret agent, a family of rabbits, etc.)
- Go to the drawing of your house and look at the suggestions you got.
- Individually, choose one character you’d like to explore today and write a brief description of it. (If you can’t find a character to your taste, then make a suggestion of your own).
- Share with your partner the characters you got, your choice, and your brief description.
- Arrange a meeting between the two characters: Where could they meet? (For example, in a local coffee shop, at the bus station, in a dream that someone is dreaming, etc.).
- Improvise: Play your characters’ first meeting for 5 minutes. You don’t have to plan the meeting beforehand. You only have to be clear about the following questions: who, where and what: Who the characters are; where they are; and what is each one of them doing. Let the scene unfold.
- Process together how you felt in the roles.
- Create a theatre piece for the characters by filling in the following details:
 - 1) Name of the play
 - 2) Genre
 - 3) Brief synthesis of the play
- Prepare something of your play to present to the group, choosing one of the following formats:
 - a) A poster (still picture)

- b) A series of still pictures
 - c) A preview/ trailer
 - d) A fragment of a scene
- Presentations.
 - Process with whole group.

Key questions for processing:

- How was it for me to get someone else's perspective of my house?
- How was it for me to try to imagine my partner's house?
- Is the character I played connected with my life?
- If the play we created was a dream that I dreamt, what would be the meaning of it for me?

What's in a name?

Goals:

- To explore hidden emotions connected with one's biography from a new angle.
- To develop imagination and creativity.
- To become aware of the emotional charge that names hold for us.

Materials:

- Papers and pencils

Procedure:

- Members find a place in the room to sit comfortable on their own, and bring writing material.
- Make a list of all the names you can recall that you were given or called throughout your life. Include maiden names, nicknames, role names (like “teacher” or “mammy”), special names given to you by a particular person, etc.
- Add a sign (+) or (-) to those names that have a positive or a negative connotation for you.
- Choose one to focus on today, knowing that it’s meaning will be hidden and that you will not be asked to disclose anything about the real story of that name.
- On the other side of the page, write the name you chose backwards.
- Imagine this name is a word in another language. What language would it be? It doesn’t have to be a language you know; it can even be an ancient tongue or an invented one – like ancient Esperanto or Martian.
- What does this word mean? Think intuitively, by its sound. Write a dictionary explanation of the word.
- Write a sentence that includes the word. (For example, “all the *isus* come home regularly in the evening.”)
- Imagine that this sentence is part of a paragraph. The sentence could be at the beginning, middle or end of the paragraph. Write the whole paragraph.

- Where does this paragraph come from? Is it from a book? The internet? A newspaper? Write briefly about the source where this paragraph appears.
- Divide in groups of 3-4.
- Share your materials with your small group.
- Choose one to develop as a scene to present to the whole group.
- Present scenes.
- Process.

Key questions for processing

- Is the story that emerged from the name's reversal connected to the name's meaning in any way?
- What feelings come up for me as I played with the new word created from the name?
- Anything I want to share about the process of choosing the name?
- Anything I want to share about the process of choosing one of the paragraphs to present?
- What happened for the participants whose stories were chosen, in the translation from text to drama, from individual work to collaborative work?

DRAMATIC RESONANCES¹

The technique of Dramatic Resonances is an advanced drama therapy form of intervention, used mostly in groups. The resonances themselves are a set of creative responses offered from within dramatic reality by some participants as a response to a personal experience, a dream, a question, an inner conflict, or any narration posed by a group member in a drama therapy setting. The responses take inspiration from the original account and remain attuned to its spirit, with which they resonate (Pendzik, 2008).

Resonances are performed at various degrees of aesthetic distance from the initial input, ranging from a close rendering of the experience (mirroring) to an archetypal representation (universal). The two formats presented below illustrate respectively the closest (mirroring) and the most distanced (universal) forms of resonances.

Mirroring Resonance: *Parla! (Speak)*

Goals:

- To examine an inner conflict from a perspective.
- To develop listening skills.
- To teach and practice Playback Theatre techniques

Procedure

¹ For further information on Dramatic Resonances, see: Pendzik, S. (2008). "Dramatic Resonances: A technique of intervention in drama therapy, supervision, and training." *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 35, 217-223.

- The group divides into triads.
- Members take turns to discuss a particular conflict they are dealing with in their lives (or have dealt with in the past).
- Using their partners' bodies, each member in turn sculpts their conflict. They work in silence and try to be precise as a sculptor.
- When the sculpture is ready, the sculptor steps back and watches the sculpture for a moment.
- At his/her word "parla" (speak), the sculpture comes alive, moving, saying and doing something for about 1-2 minutes.
- The exercise finishes when the sculpture freezes of its own accord (as in Playback Theatre's "fluid sculptures.")

Comments:

- The participants performing as sculptures should not "invent" a role, but take the cue for their performance from the previous discussion on the conflict as well as from the physical posture in which the sculptor places them.
- The participants performing as sculptures try to mirror the conflict back to the author, without striving to reach a solution. The performance should be kept brief (about 1-2 minutes).

Universal Resonance: the Nature Metaphor

Goals:

- To view a personal situation from a broad aesthetic distance.

- To link the personal with the universal realms.
- To develop listening skills.

Procedure

- The group divides into triads.
- In turns, each member becomes the “teller”, and the other two “the listeners.”
- The teller gets some protected time (3-5 minutes) to talk about a personal situation that s/he is concerned with at the moment: something that’s “on their mind.” The listeners pay close attention to the account.
- At the end of the description the listeners try to find a phenomenon from the world of nature that encapsulates the experience they’ve just heard: What’s it like? Like river that is drying up? An earthquake? A newborn puppy? Members offer their metaphors, but the chosen one should be approved by the teller.
- Once the phenomenon has been agreed upon, the listeners find a way to present it in a dramatic form – for instance, using sound and movement. The teller watches the performance.
- Process briefly and switch to another group member.

TRAINING & FACILITATION TECHNIQUES

Entering Dramatic Reality through the Back

Goals:-

- Exploring a personal question by creating ample aesthetic distance from it.
- Teaching about the nature of dramatic reality and its connection with normal reality.
- Teaching about the wisdom of dramatic reality as a means to approach an issue from an unusual angle.
- Developing intimacy and collaboration between group members.
- Cultivating imagination and listening skills.
- Practicing entering/exiting dramatic reality, supporting and enriching it, and improving its quality.
- Practicing how to accompany someone into his/her inner world and making interventions in it.

Material: Paper and pens.

Procedure:

- After an appropriate warm up, participants are instructed to think of a current question or issue that they are dealing with, that occupies their minds.
- They are given some time (5-10 minutes) to write freely about it.

- At the end of the writing phase, they are invited to formulate a specific question they would like to ask if they had a chance to pose it to a Wise Person. They should write the question.
 - Group divides into pairs. One member becomes the “Traveler” and the other, the “Companion.”
 - Travelers are asked to briefly share their issue and the question with their Companions (5-10 minutes).
 - Travelers are instructed to find a place in the room on which they can lay their backs in a standing position: a wall, a door, a window, or any other surface. (Lying down on the floor should be avoided).
- Companions place themselves near their Travelers, so that they can listen to their whispering. Pairs should be well distributed in the space, so that there is plenty of room between them.
- Travelers close their eyes and take a few deep breaths. They are told they will be going to an imaginary place, which they will discover step by step as they get there. They should avoid trying to force their imagination to create a certain place or to go to a place they’d like to be in; instead, they are encouraged to allow a place to appear in their minds by being attuned to their immediate experience.
 - As a first step, the group facilitator guides Travelers as a group by asking them basic questions about the space in which they find themselves. These start from the place where their backs are laid:

“Imagine you are not in this room, but somewhere else, in another place. Pay attention to the place where your back is

resting now... What is this surface...? Is it hot or cold...? How is its texture ...? Is it rough, soft, patterned...? What color is it...? What is it made of...? Where are you standing: Outside or inside? Do you know what time of the day is it...? How is the light in the place where you are...? What's the temperature...? Now, move your awareness to your feet: Where are you standing? On what kind of surface are you standing...? What color is it...?

- As soon as they can, the Travelers start whispering their answer, each person to her/his own Companion. These would eventually replace the group facilitator in the asking of the questions. After a few minutes, the group facilitator gives this role over to the Companions, so that each pair works on its own. (The group facilitator may intervene if needed).
- The Companions' goal is to try to help the Travelers get a clear vision of the place. For this purpose, they are instructed to formulate questions that refer to the landscape of the place, and that are largely connected to the senses, such as: "Do you hear any sounds around the area?" "What color is the door?" and so on. Questions about how they "feel" or trying to build "stories" are not encouraged. The exercise is more about creating a landscape and inhabiting it.
- At a certain point Travelers are invited to open their eyes, and to try to "impose" the place of their imagination upon reality. This process is not easy, and therefore, it is recommended to do it gradually – opening and closing the eyes several times. Although the tendency is to try to keep the eyes closed (because it's easier to experience the place as

- “real” in this way), once the initial barrier is overcome, participants are usually able to do this.
- Once their eyes are open, Travelers are encouraged to walk around their imaginary place with their Companions. (The walking is done in the actual space as well).
 - The Companions are requested to support the establishment of the place through their questions and their presence: They literally “join in” the place, and do everything they can in order to make it as *real* as possible. Pairs walk around the room, each in their own imaginary bubble – contact between pairs is not encouraged, so that each Traveler experiences his/her imaginary place with their Companions.
 - After about 10 minutes of “touring” the space, Companions are instructed to ask Travelers if there is anything specific they need or want to do in their space, before coming back. (For instance, bathe in the river, pick up some fruits, talk to a tree, or any other intervention.) They get some time to do this, with the Companions’ help (if needed).
 - The Companions instruct the Travelers to go back to the place where they laid their back at the beginning of the journey and help them to come back to normal reality.
 - Pairs take time to process the experience together and share their feelings/thoughts about it.
 - In the last stage of the processing, the Companions take the role of helping the Travelers to “make sense” of the experience by reflecting on the personal question they asked at the beginning of the exercise,

and looking for any connection between the journey to the imaginary place and the question that was on their minds. It is possible that the journey may illuminate the question or be obliquely related to it – as a dream is to reality.

- Pairs take some time to reflect on their own (write, if they want).
- Process with the whole group.
- Eventually, participants swap places, so that the Companions become the travelers and vice versa.

Key questions for processing:

To the Travelers:

- If this journey was a dream, what would be the meaning of the imaginary place for me?
- Was there any connection between the question and the journey to the imaginary place?
- How was the presence of the Companion for me? Was it helpful (or not)? In what way?
- How was it for me to open the eyes as opposed to staying with eyes closed?

To the Companions:

- How was it for me to accompany someone else to their imaginary place?
- What was the most challenging phase of my role?
- Is that connected in any way to my challenges as a therapist?

Today's journey²

Goals:

- To develop active listening skills.
- To enhance the facilitator's perception of verbal and nonverbal language.
- To practice entrance into dramatic reality in individual work.
- To become aware of counter-transference aspects of facilitation through paying attention to two inner roles: the "Savior" and the "Judge".

Materials:

- Colors, pencils, papers.
- Anything that might be useful when working with action techniques.

Recommendations:

This technique has four sequential phases, which gradually increase the level of skills required. Except for the first phase (which can be done on its own), it is not appropriate to perform it at the beginning of a training group. To move on to the following phases, participants should be familiar with action techniques in order for the exercise to bear fruits.

The exercise is performed in couples. For continuity reasons, it is recommended to do an entire sequence (which may take up to two hours) in one single meeting. If time does not allow for both participants to experience both roles, swapping can be done in the following session.

² The first part of this exercise is based on an idea by David Powley which I then modified. See Powley, D. (1987) "Dramatherapy and drama." In Sue Jennings (ed.), *Dramatherapy: Theory and practice for teachers and clinicians*. London: Routledge.

Each phase is structured carefully, and it is important to keep the structure. This includes the amount of time suggested for each part. The time limits proposed have been thought over and do not constitute an arbitrary decision: A reasonable amount of time has been allotted to each phase in order to keep the focus on the task at hand and avoid unnecessary diversions. Because the exercise touches upon the current life of the participants, it may elicit contents that cannot be contained within a training situation. Thus the time structure provides safety.

Procedure:

FIRST PHASE: PRACTICING ACTIVE LISTENING

- The group divides in pairs.
 - A brief relaxation exercise is performed.
 - One member of the couple agrees to be the “teller” and the other, the “listener.”
 - Tellers are asked to recall the events of the day, from the time they woke up until their arrival in the group, as if it was a journey. They are invited to remember not only the events themselves, but also their own feelings and thoughts in connection with them.
 - The tellers have five minutes to tell “the journey of their day” to their partner. The report is not to be interrupted, nor is finished before the five minutes are over. If it does, the pair remains in silence until the end of their turn.
- Participants should not strive to cover the whole day: For the exercise’s purposes it doesn’t matter if time is up when the narration is still in the first few minutes of the day. The tellers can use silence as well as words to relate their day, if they so wish.

- The listeners are instructed to pay full attention to the journey, while at the same time, trying to identify “charged” or “special” moments in the narration.
- When time is up, the couples take a few minutes to process: Listeners share with their partners the “charged” or “special moments” they have identified, as well as what gave them the clue to recognize them³.
- They both agree on one particular “special moment” that can be explored in the second phase. It is important to point out that the teller has the last word in choosing the moment. (Perhaps the moment suggested by the listener is too compromising or inappropriate to bring up in this context).

SECOND PHASE: PRACTICING SELF-AWARENESS

- The couples take another five-minute period to elaborate on the “special moment” chosen.
- The listeners ask questions and gather further details about the event or issue that this moment seems to refer to. During this interview, the listeners are instructed to pay attention to two different levels of interactions:

a) Listen to the nature and kind of images that their partners are using as they speak about the issue: Are these primarily visual? Are they auditory or related to the body? Is a particular metaphor coming up again and again?

³ If facilitators wish to perform only the first part of this exercise with a particular group, this is a good place to end it.

b) Monitor two inner voices that might become activated in their head while talking/listening to their partners: The voice of the “Judge” and the voice of the “Savior”⁴. They do not share the voices at this point, but just keep an eye on them, and try to register them for further use at a later stage.

- Using their perception of the images as a guide, the listener suggests to the teller a range of activities that might be helpful in order to explore the moment by taking it into dramatic reality. (For example, drawing, moving, role- playing, story work, etc. – depending on the nature of the images and the issue to be explored.)
- The tellers have to agree to one of the options suggested - or propose one themselves. Their agreement concludes the second phase.

THIRD PHASE: PRACTICING WORK IN DRAMATIC REALITY

- Pairs get 15-20 minutes to explore the issue in dramatic reality. The work should be focused on carrying out the particular task that was agreed upon in the previous phase, and bring it to a closure by briefly processing it.

FOURTH PHASE: PROCESSING AND EVALUATION

- Participants take some time to process the entire sequence individually by writing about it. The tellers may wish to record for themselves something that

⁴Judgments usually play along these lines: “I would *never* do such a thing;” “she’s got it all wrong”, etc. Saving impulses sound like: “Poor thing!” “I wish I could make her feel better,” “don’t worry, it will be fine...” and so on.

occurred to them in the process; the listeners may disclose to themselves the contents of the files of the “Judge” and the “Savior.” It is important to let participants know that they will *not* be requested to read their process notes to anybody, so that they write freely, without censorship.

- Pairs take an additional ten-minute period to process and evaluate the exercise together, from their respective roles as tellers or listeners.
- The exercise is processed with the entire group.

Key questions for processing:

First Phase

- What helped the listener to identify the “moments”?
- What signals or clues did the listener follow? (The tone of the teller’s voice, the content of the narration, body language, etc.)
- Did the moments pointed out by listeners coincide with what the tellers considered to be their “charged” moments?

Second Phase

- What did the listener learn about the inner voices of the “Judge” and the “Savior”?
- Did the tellers perceive the presence of their partner’s inner voices in any way?
- What can the listener do in order to neutralize these inner voices? Is there a need to do further work on them?

- Did the listener manage to pay attention to all the levels of interaction at once?
- Were the action techniques that the listener suggested adequate in order to explore the issue at hand?
- Was the focus on the imagery helpful in order to select an appropriate action technique?

Third phase

- Was there any difference between talking about an issue and exploring it in dramatic reality?
- Did anything unexpected or surprising occur during the exploration?
- What did the tellers learn from exploring their “moments” in dramatic reality?

Fourth phase

- How did I feel in my role as listener or teller?
- What factors contributed to elicit these feelings?
- What did the listeners learn from this exercise about themselves as facilitators?
- What facilitation issues did the exercise bring up for me?

The judge and the savior

Goals:

- To become aware of these aspects of the facilitator’s counter-transference.

- To develop the capacity to own counter-transference's processes and contents.

Materials:

- Pens and papers.

Procedure:

- The group divides in of 3-4 members.
- Each subgroup takes a piece of paper and places it in the middle.
- On one corner of the paper they write the word "Judge" and on another, the word "Savior".
- For three minutes, they free-associate with these words, writing them in silence.
- Then each member marks the words that are more charged or make the strongest impact on them (a few for each role).
- Each person writes individually a short character description of both the Judge and the Savior, using the words they marked as a basis.
- Members return to the small groups and share their descriptions.
- Small groups are invited to present their characters in a chorus format to the whole group. The chorus should express the uniformity of the role as well as give space to the individual differences, represented by the diversity of the characters.
- Processing: Members discuss the similarities and differences between the characters created by the participants on the basis of the same roles, referring to their presence in their lives and as inner aspects of themselves.

Key questions for processing:

- Where do these characters come from?
- Am I acquainted with these figures in myself?
- Are there specific circumstances that bring them to life in me?
- Are they all positive or all negative?
- How can I neutralize the negative aspects of these characters while keeping its positive attributes?

Bibliography

Pendzik, S (1999, 2nd edition). Gruppenarbeit Mit Mißhandelten Frauen: Ein Handbuch. Munich: AG Spak Bucher, kooperationspartner Paulo-Freira-Gesellschaft e.V. , Munchen,159 pp. <http://www.agspak-buecher.de/Susana-Pendzik-Gruppenarbeit-mit-misshandelten-Frauen>

Pendzik, S. (2008). "Dramatic Resonances: A technique of intervention in drama therapy, supervision, and training." *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 35, 217-223.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0197455608000221>

Powley, D. (1987) "Dramatherapy and drama." In Sue Jennings (ed.), *Dramatherapy: Theory and practice for teachers and clinicians*. London: Routledge.

Susana Pendzik. PhD, RDT, (1958) is a senior drama-therapist, trained in San Francisco, California. She is an accredited supervisor by the Israeli Association of Creative and Expressive Therapies, a Registered Drama Therapist at NADTA (North American Association for Drama Therapists), and an honorary member of the Swiss Dramatherapy Association. She is a regular lecturer at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Tel-Hai Academic College, and the Dramatherapy Institute of Switzerland, teaching as well in other institutions worldwide.

Born in Argentina, Susana has lived in Mexico, and the U.S, and has been a resident of Jerusalem for over two decades. She is a mother, a poet, a theatre director, and a researcher. She is the author of many articles on drama therapy, a book for using action techniques with abused women,

and recently co-editor of *Assessment in Drama Therapy* (2011), along with David Johnson and Stephen Snow.

Email: pend@netvision.net.il

“Drama therapy empowers people because it comes from a place of respect for creativity: It encourages human beings to author their life”

Keywords for the exercises:

WARM UPS

Playing each other like an instrument: physical warm up, sound and movement warm up, embodiment, body awareness, trust building in pairs, playfulness.

A dialogue with the back: physical warm up, emotional warm up, embodiment, trust building in pairs, playfulness.

DRAMA THERAPY BASICS

Creating a play in pairs: creativity and playfulness, listening skills, collaborative work, drama therapy methods, aesthetic distance.

What's in a name? name-game, imagination, creativity, hidden feelings, aesthetic distance.

DRAMATIC RESONANCES

Mirroring Resonance: Parla! (Speak): Listening skills, empathy, embodied images, embodying feelings, conflict, mirroring, playback techniques.

Universal Resonance: the Nature Metaphor: listening skills, empathy, translating the personal into universal, archetypal resonance, shamanic metaphors, working from inside dramatic reality, aesthetic distance, self-awareness,

TRAINING & FACILITATION TECHNIQUES

Entering dramatic reality through the back: developing intimacy, listening skills, imagination, physicalizing the subjective, working in dramatic reality, facilitating skills, drama-therapy skills, aesthetic distance.