Psychodrama: Theatrical Therapy Project

The Step Before Letting Go

Question/Problem: Before an actor can become a character, the actor first needs to be in touch with the self (secure with the real self, not the character). Only after they have accomplished this to the best of their abilities can they ‘let go’ and become someone else (a character). Through the use of drama/theatrical techniques and exercises, is it possible to improve the actor’s quality of life (self esteem/self confidence, ability to deal with stress, etc.) with the goal of improving self awareness? Also, what effect might this have on the actor’s perception of their own acting abilities?

Hypothesis: After experiencing different theatrical techniques and exercises, an individual (in this case, an actor) will score higher on tests of quality of life such as self esteem/self confidence, ability to deal with stress, etc. This, in turn, will help the actor become more self aware and thus improve their abilities to ‘let go’ when needing to become a character.

Methods: At the beginning of the semester, the group will be tested on various quality of life characteristics. The group will then spend the semester experiencing assorted acting techniques and exercises with the goal not being a ‘performance’ but the betterment of the individual. Once they have gone through this program, they will be re-tested on the same quality of life characteristics. Also, actors will be asked to reflect (through a questionnaire format) on how they feel the program helped their performance abilities.

Resources: Group of college students (yet to be determined number) from the theater department; questionnaires/testing requirements necessary for measuring quality of life of students; questionnaires to get feedback from students regarding their thoughts on performance abilities and improvements; materials required for both the compilation and execution of acting exercises (books, items for actual exercises)
The Step Before Letting Go

The above proposal was created with the Gettysburg College Theater Department, my experience with the department and my major in mind. After three years of working in the theater department, I've found that performances are exceptional and the process toward developing the actors toward those performances is first-rate. After taking Advanced Acting, one of the courses in my Psychodrama major, however, I've learned that one key aspect to acting is the actor as a self. In order for an actor to 'let go' and become a character, it is essential that they are aware and confident of their own self. This aspect, purely due to time constraints, is lacking in the department and I would like to explore it as it fits perfectly into my major.

Prof. Chris Kauffman and Prof. Kevin Wilson have agreed to work with me on this project. Prof. Kauffman will be my primary advisor and assist in the development of a program. Prof. Kauffman is well versed in acting exercises and various theorists and will be a great asset when developing the program. Prof. Wilson will help with the research/scientific side of the project as he has great amounts of experience in the field of psychology.

At the beginning of the Spring Semester, a yet to be determined number of students from the Theater Department, will be tested on various levels of self awareness and quality of life (self-confidence, self esteem, etc.). After this testing, the group will participate in a program that I will develop. This program will contain various acting/theatrical exercises from an assortment of theorists such as Meisner, Chekov, etc. The program will be run with the development of self-awareness for the actors as selves (not as characters) in mind rather than a final 'performance'. This self-awareness should, in turn, aid the actors when, in future performances, they are asked to 'let go' and become a character.
After completion of the program, the group will again be tested on the same quality of life aspects as the beginning of the semester. They will also be asked to reflect upon how they feel they may have improved on performance abilities due to becoming more self aware through the program. By the end of the semester, I intend to complete both a scientific research paper (reporting the results of the quality of life levels of the group and any changes that occurred) and a ‘handbook’ (describing, in detail, the program itself - including my notes, thoughts on what worked, did not work and why, etc.). I have set up deadlines with Prof. Kauffman and Prof. Wilson for drafts of the paper and the handbook.

Not only do I feel that this project will help me learn more about my major (including my second/double, psychology major) as I will be applying both psychological and psychodrama principles, but also will help other students - specifically those in the theater department. The main mission of psychodrama is focused on helping others through the use of theatrical techniques. Therefore, I feel that this project exemplifies a way in which I can help others while learning more myself.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week of</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Jan 19  | Compilation of Materials Necessary  
Meet with Prof. Kauffman and Prof. Wilson to discuss beginning of semester |
| Jan 26  | Formulate list of students to be involved  
Hold first meeting for students to explain general plan  
Meet with Prof. Kauffman and Prof. Wilson to discuss what occurred at meeting and planning for testing |
| Feb 2   | Testing of group of students  
Analysis of data  
Meet with Prof. Kauffman and Prof. Wilson to discuss results of data and best way to proceed with program |
| Feb 9   | Finish testing and analysis of data  
Meet with Prof. Kauffman to further discuss how best to approach the program (what needs to be focused on, etc.)  
Begin Writing Research paper with all experimentation that has been done thus far |
| Feb 16  | First meetings of the Program/Group of Students  
Meet with Prof. Kauffman to discuss program |
| Feb 23  | Continuation of Program Meetings  
Meet with Prof. Kauffman to discuss findings of program |
| March 2 | Turn in first draft of Research Paper (experiment report thus far)  
Turn in first two weeks of notes from program meetings  
Meet with Prof. Kauffman and Prof. Wilson to discuss |
| March 9 - SPRING BREAK | Re-evaluate direction of program and find additional exercises, appropriate for the group after having worked with them for two weeks |
| March 16 | Meet with Prof. Kauffman and Wilson to discuss re-evaluation  
Continuation of Program Meetings |
| March 23 | Continuation of Program Meetings  
Meet with Prof. Kauffman to discuss program findings  
Turn in all Program Notes at end of week |
Turn in Second Draft of Research Paper

March 30  
Continuation of Program Meetings
Meet with Prof. Kauffman and Wilson to discuss program findings and Research Paper

April 6  
Continuation of Program Meetings
Meet with Prof. Kauffman to discuss program findings

April 13  
Final week of Program Meetings
Work on compiling Program notes
Meet with Prof. Kauffman and Prof. Wilson to discuss last program meetings and upcoming testing

April 20  
Re-testing of Group of students
Analysis of data
Meet with Prof. Kauffman and Wilson to discuss implications of re-testing data

April 27  
Finish analysis of data from re-testing
Finish writing Research Paper
Meet with Prof. Kauffman and Prof. Wilson to discuss any final questions, findings, etc.

May 4/Finals Week  
Final Research Paper due
Final Program Notes/Binder due
**Annotated Bibliography**

Bain, Clark, Jorge Burmeister, and Manuela Maciel. *Psychodrama - Advances in Theory and Practice*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2007. By focusing on developments in the theory and practice of psychodrama, these authors integrate different psychodramatic schools of thought by bringing together contributions from around the world. Not only will this book assist in looking at modern psychodrama across the globe, but it will also aid in placing the field of psychodrama in the bigger picture of counseling, psychology and psychotherapy.

Bartow, Arthur. *Training of the American Actor*. New York, NY: Theater Communications Group, 2006. This book offers excellent insight into different acting techniques and practices including a comprehensive section on Stanford Meisner (one of the acting theorists I would like to base much of my work on). The book goes into great detail and explanation of various tactics in acting methods and also provides examples as a way of illustrating precisely what each method aims to do for the actor.

Blatner, Adam. *Acting-In: Practical Applications of Psychodramatic Methods*. 3rd. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, 1996. Blatner breaks down the basic theories, procedures, advantages of and even cautions about psychodrama as practice. The book provides a wealth of case examples from which he reviews some of the most recent developments in psychodrama theory. The content focuses mainly on group therapies and how the psychodramatist or ‘director’ can best form group cohesion and guide the group through the process of discovery of the self and others.

Greenberg, Ira A.. *Psychodrama - Theory and Therapy*. New York, NY: Behavioral Publications, 1974. An older book, Greenburg discusses many of the foundation topics of psychodrama and, specifically, examines many of the original theories and ideas that went into the creation of psychodrama. While much of the focus is on J.L. and Zerka Moreno’s work, the author also compares their studies and findings to other early theorists in the field. By focusing on these topics, this book provides a superb resource for a historical look into psychodrama and can be used as a reference for numerous advancements - how the field has changed and why.

Jones, Phil. *Drama as Therapy*. 2nd. New York, NY: Routledge, 1996. An excellent resource into the field of drama therapy, this book pulls from the history of the field, present practices and theories being discovered and the future of how to progress beyond the field. Rather than focusing on the specific approaches of drama therapy, Jones maintains an emphasis on the therapeutic effects of drama. Therefore, this source will assist in discovering the ways in which drama therapy/psychodrama may effect the group and what to expect as outcomes from the program.
Karp, Marcia, Paul Holmes, and Kate Bradshaw Trauvon. *The Handbook of Psychodrama*. New York, NY: Brunner-Routledge, 1998. Clearly, this book will be of great use when examining the field and creating the program. A step by step guide to psychodrama, the authors write about the fundaments of psychodrama (the warm-up, action, sharing, etc.) that will be pertinent to developing the program. Also, the book provides straightforward situations and examples of various circumstances that the psychodramatist may encounter with a group and offers suggestions and tips to deal with these.

Krasner, David. *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2000. From Stanislavsky and Stella Adler to Meisner and Strasberg, this book takes a close look into the theories and programs that various theater greats have developed over the years. Krasner provides an excellent overview of the numerous theories of method acting and holds them up to examine for the reader. This will be of great use when looking into different acting exercises and theories to utilize in the program itself. I intend to use a variety of theories - this book provides a comprehensive look into some of those theories.

Moreno, J. L. *Psychodrama*. 1st. New York, NY: Beacon House, 1946. Moreno is considered to be one of the founding fathers of Psychodrama. This is the first printed compilation of his ideas and theories. Not only will it assist in learning more about the research behind Psychodrama, it will also provide some pointers off of which the program can be developed. In addition, this reading will assist in discovering the benefits to Psychodrama programs and the basic structures for which such practices should follow.

Reich, Warren A., Kent D. Harber, and Harold I. Siegel. "Self-structure and Well-being in Life Transitions." *Self and Identity* 7(2008): 129-150. This article is an example of the type of article I will be using as my reference for the research paper portion of the project. In this article, for example, the researchers discuss ways of measuring different qualities of life (ex. self-congruence). Papers such as this one will be excellent resources when determining how to measure life qualities and how to best report the findings in experimental paper format.

Silverberg, Larry. *The Sanford Meisner Approach - Workbook Two: Emotional Freedom*. Lyme, NH: Smith and Kraus, Inc., 1997. Silverberg, through the Stanford Meisner approach/theory, examines how the actor can best use emotional demands to their benefit by using creativity and understanding. Through the use of this workbook, exercises are presented that are aimed at giving the actor insight into his/her emotions and identify traps that many people face when expressing emotion. This book, along with the following two workbooks, will aid in developing a Meisner aspect to the program.

Silverberg, Larry. *The Sanford Meisner Approach - Workbook Three: Tackling the Text*. Lyme, NH: Smith and Kraus, Inc., 1998. Like the previous workbook, Silverberg examines how the actor can utilize exercises to improve the self. In this specific workbook, he discusses
ways in which text and perceived notions can be a trap for individuals and ways in which the person can avoid these problems. He guides the reader through a step by step process of discovering ways to bringing authenticity to life.

Silverberg, Larry. The Sanford Meisner Approach - Workbook Four: Playing the Part. Hanover, NH: Smith and Kraus, Inc., 2000. Similar to the above two workbooks, the fourth book in the series looks at exercises which focus the actor on examining how to be deeply authentic in one’s life by using imagination and creativity. Again, these books will contribute to help create part of the program as I develop aspects of various theories such as the Meisner technique.