ROLE TRAINING

General comments:

Role training "applies principles of role theory and specific techniques to bring about the development of a specific aspect of human functioning such that goals for work or for one's personal life are achieved more fully. The role trainer has a capacity to delineate a specific aspect of functioning that a person wishes to improve and a specific situation in which this functioning occurs. A role trainer produces a crisp enactment, makes a role assessment, plans further interventions, introduces a role test, and re-establishes connections with a group within which the role training may have taken place. A role trainer is skilled in mobilising the spontaneity of a group to assist an individual to develop adequate functioning." **(Training & Standards Manual, 2008 edition, page 3).**

Participants actively learn by thinking, feeling and acting that there are alternative courses of action. They also learn to distinguish between rejection of a pattern of behaviour and rejection of the person.
Role training emphasises the concept of learning by doing. This involves the display of self in action as well as reflection on this process. This contrasts with experiences in the education system where the learner is a passive recipient and memoriser. In this other setting the teacher acts and the student is passive, the teacher knows a lot and the student knows little, and the teacher determines what is to be learned. It is important to remember that most participants arrive at a role training session with this experience in their background and typically are in some stance of rebellion to it.

Structure of a Session.

A role training session has three phases: warm-up, action and sharing.

1. Warm-up:
The purpose of the session is discussed, or it may have already been decided beforehand. The director may use an activity or discussion to focus the group on a particular topic or set of roles.
A protagonist for the group is selected by using sociometric principles. The protagonist is interviewed and a contract for action is developed.

2. Action:

- SCENE SETTING & ENACTMENT:

Scene setting involves orientating to time, place and person. Through the placing of objects on the stage significant physical dimensions are represented, (wall, desk, chairs etc.) The protagonist chooses group members to represent relevant others. Through interviewing, concretisation and role reversal the protagonist, the group and the producer warm up to the situation to be enacted. The enactment may contain all or any of the following elements.

- MIRRORING:

A group member enacts the behaviour portrayed by the protagonist or aspects of the role. The protagonist stands with the director and observes. This provides opportunities for new perspectives on behaviour, which is essential when it comes to developing new roles. A person gets to "see themselves as they are. That is a person sees a portrait of themselves." [Clayton 1992, pg 28]
It is important to remember that that the purpose of mirroring is to increase self-awareness and never to mimic or ridicule the protagonist. Mirroring must always been done with respect. No mirror is perfect; there is always an element of distortion and at least a grain of truth. Mirroring is an excellent way of stimulating audience participation.

- ROLE REVERSAL:

Through stepping into the shoes of the other, the protagonist experiences and expresses the thoughts, feelings and actions of the other. This leads to a greater awareness of the other person's reality, which can be used to clarify problems caused by partial perceptions or lack of communication.
Role reversal can also be used to test catastrophic fantasies of the effect of new behaviour on others.

- ASSESSMENT, DISCUSSION AND PLANNING:

Following the enactment a role analysis is made, using role theory and systems theory. Depending on the circumstances the formality of this will vary. The assessment is used as the basis for a plan of action. If at this point the protagonist is ready to play a new role and can do so adequately, then this is enacted and followed through with sharing. Sometimes more work is required and this may involve further role reversal, mirroring, modelling and coaching.

- MODELLING:
This is a process of learning by observation. The behaviour of the model acts to stimulate the thought, feelings and behaviour of the protagonist. Instead of talking about it the model demonstrates the role to be developed. The purpose of modelling is to stimulate spontaneity by generating a range of possibilities, including unlikely or even outrageous options.
It may be useful for the protagonist to take up the auxiliary role that the model is responding to. This gives the protagonist a full experience of this new option alerting them to the impact and the consequence.

- COACHING:
This is an important aspect of good role training work. The common social model of coach (as in sports) needs to be extended. A good coach acts as:

- Encouraging Prompter, helping the protagonist to move in the required direction.
- Keen Observer, feeding back objective information about the protagonist's behaviour.

- Generous Consultant, listening, answering questions & sharing knowledge.
- Clear Communicator, working to clarify spoken & unspoken behaviour.
- Believer in the Creative Genius, operating from the understanding that every person is capable of creativity and spontaneity.
- Celebrating Cheerleader, who knows when to throw a party or quietly congratulate a protagonist who has adequately performed a new role.

- ROLE TESTING:

The new role may be tested and strengthened by role reversal in the actual scene that was first presented. If an emerging role is still in embryonic form, too much role testing can be counterproductive. A plan for further work may be made, which may include homework.

3. SHARING:

Through the process of sharing the protagonist is integrated back into the group. Sharing is an opportunity for self-disclosure of feelings, meaning and values; and the consolidation of learning for the group (this is not a time for analysis and interpretation).
Through sharing group members learn:

- that they are not alone in their concerns
- to experience greater intimacy
- to begin to order their own concerns

People need help to learn as well as to unlearn. Sharing assists the process of increasing self-awareness and can lead to a group discussion or act as a warm-up to the next session.

Recommended reading:

Enhancing Life and Relationships, a Role Training Manual".
G.M. Clayton. 1992.
ICA Press, 176 Hawthorn Road, Caulfield, Vic. Australia 3162.

Training and Standards Manual. 2008.
Australia and New Zealand Psychodrama Association.

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