



**COMMON LANGUAGE for PSYCHOTHERAPY (clp) PROCEDURES**  
[www.commonlanguagepsychotherapy.org](http://www.commonlanguagepsychotherapy.org)

**PSYCHODRAMA**

**Adam BLATNER**, 103 Crystal Springs Drive, Georgetown, TX 78633, USA;  
ph +1 512 864-0516.

Definition: Improvised role playing to reveal and help a client's problems.

Elements: Directed by a therapist or group leader, the client role plays interactions with significant others, done together with group members (trained or volunteers) who act the roles of other people important in that role play. The client role plays in a special area in the room. Group members witness, share, and encourage. Facilitating techniques include: role reverse, double (another person expresses the client's unspoken thoughts; mirror (client stands to the side and watches someone replay the scene, to see how his behaviour looked from the outside; exaggerate (a phrase or behaviour so the client discovers underlying feelings); concretize (physically act out what was said e.g. "feeling torn apart" - group members pull the client's arms in different directions).

Related procedures: Action methods; becoming the other; drama therapy; internalized-other interviewing; rehearsal; role-play; sociodrama (social roles), two-chair dialogue;

Application: Exploration of role conflicts - intra- or inter-personal or between groups in psychotherapy, sometimes in education, business, or community-building.

1st use? Moreno (1937)

References:

1. Blatner A (1999). Psychodrama (Chapter). In D. Wiener (Ed.), *Beyond Talk Therapy: Using Movement and Expressive Techniques in Clinical Practice*. Washington, DC. American Psychological Association Press. 1999.
2. Blatner A (2000). *Foundations of Psychodrama: History, Theory, Practice* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) New York: Springer.
3. Blatner A (2007). Morenean approaches: recognizing psychodrama's many facets. *J. of Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama & Sociometry*, 59,159-170.
4. Moreno JL (1937). Interpersonal therapy and the psychopathology of interpersonal relations. *Sociometry*, 1, 9-76.

Case illustration (Blatner 1999)

18 professionals had a psychodrama training workshop in a 2-hour session during a weekend when several role-played in warm-up, action and sharing phases. The director began warm-up: 'Tell us about your names---how you came by and feel about it.' After members had told their stories for 30 minutes: 'Who wants to explore parts of your life or finish unfinished business?' Several spoke up. Director: 'Can you each put your hand on the shoulder of whoever's story resonates with you?' Most chose Zoe, who'd spoken about unresolved losses. (This took 10 minutes.)

The director began a 30-minute early action phase by, for a minute, asking Zoe about her many losses through death, moving away, etc. He had her place a chair on the stage for each loss named - 5 to begin with. "Let's fill these chairs. Who could be your uncle Don?". Zoe pointed to a group member. Director: "Please come up as uncle Don?" Cousin Ronald etc were chosen similarly. Director: "Zoe, tell Don something you shared together." Zoe: "I remember we'd go walking and you'd show me plants."

She did this with each of the 5 people playing lost others. Director: "*Change parts*" (only Zoe could respond accurately then). Zoe took the lost person's place in the chair while that person took Zoe's position. Then, Zoe (as "Uncle Oscar") said "Yes, little Zoe, you'd say the name of the plant again and again, to practice", and described more memories to each person represented by each empty chair.

To facilitate grieving, the director asked three key questions: 1. concerned a shared memory, as above. 2. '*Tell (that person) what s/he meant to you*'. 3. After Zoe role reversed with the lost other, to that other (played by Zoe): '*Tell Zoe what she meant to you*'. Zoe did this for 5 minutes each with two people whose losses had hurt most. She cried while role-playing talking directly to, rather than "about", them. Therapist: '*Name all the other losses in your youth*'. For another 5 minutes she placed more chairs handed to her from the audience: "My friend Jane who moved away; my kitty who died when I was nine..." (This middle "action" phase lasted 40 minutes).

The session ended with sharing: '*Please come off the stage, out of role play, back into the group circle, and say your real names*': Example: one member said "I'm no longer Uncle Don, I'm Arnie again." Then, director to the group: "*Zoe shared with you. Please give back to her, say what in her role play touched you, what you felt from your own experience*". Over 40 minutes group members shared this with Zoe and often cried too.