

Forms of change

How do psychodrama, sociodrama, Playback Theatre and educational live action roleplay (edularp) contribute to change?



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Summary: *This article explores four forms with seemingly different purposes and yet many similarities, as well as “change” in these forms. It goes through the characteristics of each form and compares them and analyses the forms through Moreno’s (1978) Canon of Creativity to find out how and what kind of change they support.*

Keywords: *psychodrama, playback theatre, sociodrama, larp, edularp, change, learning, comparison*

The article is original and has not been published in other journals.

Resumen: *Este artículo explora cuatro formas con propósitos aparentemente diferentes y, sin embargo, con muchas similitudes, así como el “cambio” en estas. Recorre las características de cada formulario, las compara y las analiza a través del Canon de la creatividad de Moreno (1978) para averiguar cómo y qué tipo de cambio admiten.*

Palabras clave: *psicodrama, teatro playback, sociodrama, larp, edularp, cambio, aprendizaje, comparación.*

El artículo es original y no ha sido publicado en otras revistas.

The forms of change

They all have seemingly different purposes and yet many similarities (see Figure 1). *Change* exists in all of these forms, but what kind of change is possible with each form? The forms I chose for this article are protagonist-centered psychodrama, sociodrama, edularp (educational live action roleplaying) and Playback Theatre. Moreno’s Canon of Creativity (Moreno, 1978) gives the structure to explore change. Rather than diving deep into the psychology of change, the article explains what kind of change each form makes possible and supports. Being a practitioner of all

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the presented forms, I chose the forms² this article explores based both on their similarities as well as their connections and cross-references in literature (i.e. Harviainen, 2011; Söderberg et al., 2004; Fox, 2004; Moran & Alon, 2011; Adderley & Kirk, 2011).

To explore the different forms, I use the approach of systematic analysis, as presented by Doctor J. Tuomas Harviainen (2011, p. 174) in which documents and sources are deconstructed for their data content:

“In systematic analysis, one takes the documented properties (or opinions) of a subject, in this case the elements of certain other activities, and analytically condenses those in order to understand their essence. These parts are then compared to one another, in order to create a holistic understanding of the subject. The core essence of the method lies in systemic immanence, i.e. in that the subject document is analyzed through itself, not with external tools”

(Harviainen 2011, p. 174-175, based on Jolkkonen, 2007).

I will use my professional experiences with the above mentioned forms as “documented properties” and “condense” them through a set of criteria based on systematic analysis and my psychodrama thesis, where I compare edularp, sociodrama and psychodrama (Pitkänen, 2017). For this particular article I narrowed down the criteria only to those which reveal something essential about each form and are present in every form analysed in this article. Many aspects of all forms are not referred to in this article.

For the psychodrama community, psychodrama, sociodrama and Playback Theatre are relatively familiar forms. The connection between psychodrama and Playback Theatre is often mentioned in literature, even though they are individual forms with separate cultural and historical backgrounds (Fox, 2004). Edularp has also its own, separate roots outside psychodrama and uses the words *role* and *roleplay* with a somewhat different meaning than psychodrama theory. That is why this article exploring the differences and similarities of the forms as well as their potential in facilitating change should be helpful for all scholars and researchers who are not familiar with all the forms.

Change

“There is nothing permanent but change” -Heraclitus

² I left out forms of applied theatre (like Theatre of The Oppressed) and therapy (e.g. Gestalt, Drama Therapy) that could also have been in this comparison, since they are forms, I am not as familiar with. Thus, the comparison would have been based mostly on literature and would lack the depth of personal, professional experience.

To understand how change is present in these forms, I first need to define change. In this article I approach change from two perspectives: change through the Canon of Creativity (Moreno, 1978) from psychodrama theory and the resistance to change through psychoanalytic theory (Eagle, 1999).³

In psychodrama theory, the Canon of Creativity is at the core of both the therapeutic process as well as the theory of change. Moreno (1978) calls non-changing state *cultural conserve*. It can mean anything unquestioned, repetitive unconscious patterns, even an art piece that remains the same. With sufficient *warm-up* we can reach a *spontaneous* state. The warm-up can be action, conversation, therapy – something that helps us orient ourselves, reduce our anxiety and sometimes even to recognize the cultural conserve one wants to overcome. In a spontaneous state we can find new (or adequate) ways of action in an old situation and adequate ways of action in a new situation. That is when we are capable of creative actions, capable of change. These creative actions turn into products (concrete or abstract) and at some point might become cultural conserves themselves (Moreno, 1978, p. 45–47).

Schecht (2013) says that according to psychodrama, a spontaneous state is the basis of change, as without spontaneity we repeat the same patterns over and over again and we are stuck in our role conserves. Spontaneity-creativity can be seen as the psychodramatic concept of change. And to reach that state, we need to warm up (Schecht, 2013, p. 21). All the forms in this article can be seen as a warm-up to change. Each form has the potential to enable new perspectives of thinking, on life and ourselves. If change happens, it happens as an organic part of the personal processing after the experience in the forms.

Morris Eagle (1999) tells that in psychoanalytic theory two main reasons are recognized why people do not change. The first is choosing the known over the unknown; it is easier to deal with struggles we already know than with new struggles change would potentially lead us to. The second is the fear of losing identity. Keeping to our learnt patterns is, according to Freudian theory, biologically rewarding and thus change causes anxiety (Eagle, 1999, p. 5–6). Eagle also concludes that at the abstract level of metapsychology and the clinical theory of psychoanalysis, the individual often resists change because of their fear that the change entails even greater distress than they are currently experiencing (Eagle, 1999, p. 8). Because of the natural resistance

³ I am aware that many aspects of change will remain undiscussed here (e.g. how Solution-focused brief therapy sees change), but the scope of the current article does not enable me to discuss them further.

to change, sufficient warm-up is very important to reach the spontaneous state where change is possible.

Since all the mentioned forms have warm-up phase, an action (drama) phase and a processing phase, they can be analysed through the structure of Canon of Creativity. That leads me to my research questions: How do the forms warm-up and reduce potential anxiety to reach a spontaneous state? What is the cultural conserve in each form that can be changed? What creative action may in each form provoke change? And what is the new cultural conserve (product of change), created in this process?

Introducing the forms

LARP and Edularps

Larping means improvising under pre-defined conditions. Usually both the game master and the players of the larp are preparing the play before the larp. Live-action roleplaying games are quite hard to define precisely (Morton, 2007, as cited in Harviainen, 2011, p. 176). Harviainen (2011, p. 176–178) located parameters that help to define larp and to set it apart from other, similar forms.

- *“Role-playing in which a character, not just a social role, is played.*
- *The activity takes place in a fictional reality shared with others. Breaking that fictional reality is seen as a breach in the play itself.*
- *The physical presence of at least some of the players as their characters”* (Harviainen, 2011, p. 177).

Edularp means live-action roleplaying used to impart pre-determined pedagogical or didactic content (Balzer & Kurz, 2015). In edularps, the participants research pre-determined content by taking pre-determined roles. After the actual edularp experience the learning process usually continues with a debrief. In the debrief the participants gain insight into how their peers approached the pre-defined subject (the theme of the larp). They can as well as clarify for themselves what they have learned through the larp and what it felt like to play. Although in the marginal, edularps are used in many countries as an educational method (Bowman, 2014). Balzer and Kurz (2015) describe the idea of an edularp is to provide a motivating, often fun learning environment in a kind of “secondary reality” where students can research different phenomenon and try out new ways of thinking, behaving, reasoning and feeling without the fear of negative consequences. Since their decisions affect only the “game world”, even their setbacks

are not so demotivating, which enables the participants to return to the challenges even after failing (Balzer & Kurz, 2015).

Edularping is an action-oriented method of learning (Balzer & Kurz, 2015). The action inside the edularp is a central element in the learning process, that is, in creating both an emotional and a cognitive relationship to the phenomenon. Whereas, the work before and after the actual edularp experience is central in organizing the learnt content.

Psychodrama

Moreno (1987, p. 13) describes psychodrama as the science which explores the individual truth, using five instruments: the stage, the subject or the actor, the director, the staff of therapeutic aides or auxiliary egos and the audience. Blatner (2007) says both in psychodrama literature today as well as in this article “the subject” is referred to as *the protagonist*. In this sense, Moreno describes here the classical, protagonist-centered psychodrama and not psychodrama as an umbrella term for all the methods that can be counted as psychodramatic (Blatner, 2007). In this article when referring to psychodrama I also refer to protagonist-centered psychodrama, not the umbrella term. The classic structure of a psychodrama session consists of warming up the group to work, choosing the protagonist, doing the drama with the protagonist with the group members helping as auxiliary egos, sharing after the drama from the group members’ personal life and processing the drama after some time has passed.

Sociodrama

Sociodrama is usually considered part of psychodrama. Whereas psychodrama focuses on the individual, sociodrama focuses on the group (Garcia, 2013, p. 34–35). Sternberg and Garcia (1994) describe sociodrama is a group action method in which participants act out agreed-upon social situations spontaneously. It is also a learning process focused on providing practice in solving human relations and on helping group members to clarify values and feelings, giving them an opportunity to practice new behaviors (Sternberg & Garcia 1994, p. 1–4). The participants of a sociodrama improvise together in pre-defined and agreed-upon settings that derive from the group (Sternberg & Garcia, 1994, p. 4; Minkin, 2013, p. 6–7). The field of application as well as the definition of sociodrama covers a rather wide spectrum: It is used for therapeutic, educational and social purposes as well as in organizations for different purposes (Wiener, Adderley, & Kirk, 2011). This leads to that, that sociodrama is often used as an overall concept for methods such as group-centered or theme-centered psychodrama, pedagogical role-play, system-play, axiodrama,

bibliodrama, large-group workshops, political stage and the living newspaper (Geisler, 2005, as cited in Kellermann, 2007, p. 16), even if these are often also seen as separate, individual forms. This definition of sociodrama consists of many forms with different goals and methods, that, for the purpose of this article I had to narrow down. Whenever I refer to sociodrama in this article, I refer to role play –type sociodrama. Its structure is the closest and also the most confused with larping (Pitkänen, 2017, p. 3–4). The structure of sociodrama in this article contains of choosing the theme with the participants as well as deciding the roles (warm-up), drama, sharing and processing.

Playback Theatre

Feldhändler (2007) describes Playback Theatre as an improvisational theatre form in which the real-life stories and experiences of the audience are shared and immediately enacted on stage, using different forms that serve the story. It aims to encourage dialogue and create bonds between people in the audience. It is used in many diverse cultural and social contexts from educational to artistic, from social service institutions to theatre training and even in therapeutic settings. Playback Theatre has spread and is practiced all around the world (Feldhändler, 2007, p.46–47).

In a classic Playback Theatre performance, there is a *conductor* who interviews voluntary audience members as part of the performance, and after hearing their story, the conductor chooses a form for the enactment of the story, which is instantly enacted by the *actors* and *musicians*. One core difference of Playback Theatre to the other forms is that Playback Theatre performances have a clear division between the actors and the audience members, whereas in the other analysed forms the whole group is participating in the dramas.

4Jonathan Fox (2004), the founder of Playback Theatre, says Playback Theatre has developed ever since it was founded has been influenced by many collaborators. It has its own approach, diverging significantly from psychodrama as well as forum theatre, another form of community-based applied theatre. In Playback Theatre the performance seeks to understand and respect the stories, not find solutions or “cures” for the storytellers. Just sharing the story and seeing it mirrored, played back and interpreted by the performing group, builds a foundation for social change (Fox, 2004).

The following table shows the main similarities and differences of the analysed forms:

	Psychodrama	Sociodrama	Edularp	Playback Theatre
Focus	On the individual and on the group	On the group and on the phenomenon	On the phenomenon of the edularp	On the story of the storyteller
Process	Warm-up, choosing the protagonist, the drama, sharing, processing	Warm-up, choosing the theme and the roles, the drama, sharing, processing	Choosing the theme, writing the edularp with adequate roles, the drama, processing the drama	Choosing the theme, preparing the group for the theme The drama: setting up the performance, sharing and possibly reflecting during performance
Purpose of the form	Researching one's life with psychodramatic methods and training spontaneity	Researching a theme with a group by taking a role, and also learning about oneself in that role	Researching a phenomenon through the eyes of the role and both learning and creating a relationship to that phenomenon	Researching personal stories related to a theme, finding what makes stories special and what connects them, seeing one's life from another perspective

Figure 1: Differences and similarities

The most obvious similarity between these forms is the structure: warm-up and drama are followed by processing. The drama (creative action) part is significantly different in each form (see figure 2). Even if the focus and purpose of all forms is different, there is one goal in common:

learning. In psychodrama participants learn about themselves, about their choices and what is behind them, about their interaction and relationship with other people, spontaneity and creativity. In sociodrama participants learn about the theme, about the group, about their interactions and about themselves through the issues and questions raising during the action phase. Edularp is all about learning. A specific edularp has specific goals related to subject matter, the studied phenomenon, curriculum or other skills the edularp is supposed to teach. In Playback Theatre, the storyteller can learn about their story (what makes stories special and what connects the story to other people's stories), and thus about themselves. Learning is a form of change that connects all the forms.

Change in the forms

As said before, change is present in all the forms. The following table explores my research questions through the Canon of Creativity. I have defined the aspects with potential to change as cultural conserves, and the result of the change "New cultural conserves". The warm-up phase and the creative action, although sometimes intertwined, are now in separate categories.

	Psychodrama	Sociodrama	Edularp	Playback Theatre
The potential changes, the <i>cultural conserves</i> that can change	Changes in one's perspective to oneself and personal narrative , to one's relationships, to the life situation, to the present group	Changes in one's perspective to oneself, to one's relationships, to the life situation, to the present group, to the particular researched theme	Learning about and creating a relationship to the theme of the edularp, changes in one's relationship to the world and society, small personal changes	Changes in one's perspective to oneself and personal narrative , to the life situation, changes in how one sees one's narrative connected to other people's narratives
Warm-up leading to a spontaneous state	Light preparations, focus on warming up the group and choosing a protagonist through exercises and talking	Light or medium preparations, focus on warming up the group to the theme or finding a theme and choosing roles for participants through exercises and talking	Medium preparations for the players (getting acquainted with the material) and heavy preparations for the game master (writing the material, designing the system), warming up for the game through both narratives and exercises	Varying preparations for the performing group before the performance; In the performance the actors share of their own lives, warming the audience up to sharing. The performance warms up the audience, too, by exploring the theme from the perspectives of different stories.

Creative action leading to possible change	Going through one's inner reality with the help of the director. The sharing phase and the processing help realize the process of change, too.	Exploring the theme by improvising together. The sharing phase and the processing help realize the process of change, too.	The players improvise a story together in pre-written characters and settings. The perspectives of their characters as well as other characters might lead to new realizations; both internal and external.	Performing group performs the stories of the audience using different improvisational forms. Seeing one's story portrayed by others can lead to new realizations about one's narrative.
New cultural conserve	A more in-depth understanding of one's inner reality as well as the group	A more in-depth understanding of the theme, one's inner reality as well as the group's reality	A more in-depth understanding of the theme, and maybe new realizations of one's inner reality	A more in-depth understanding of one's own narratives, as well as other narratives in the audience, a sense of a shared experience.

Figure 2: Change in the forms

As said in the last chapter, change in these forms can be seen as learning. In psychodrama, the protagonists can understand more of different roles and people in their lives, as well as their relationship and interactions with them. The group members find connections to their own lives through the protagonist. In sociodrama, the theme is always somehow relevant to the present group. When processing, one's personal relationship to the sociodrama becomes visible, and one can reflect on both one's actions and reactions as well as the relationship to the theme. In edularps, through the eyes of a character the relationship to the theme and to the world changes. Through reflection and processing one can both learn new things about the theme, as well as oneself, reflecting on both content and emotions in the game. In Playback Theatre, when seeing one's own story portrayed on stage, it works as a mirror: what did I do, how do other people

interpret my story? It gives both the possibility to feel seen and understood, as well as the possibility to reflect on one's own stories from a new perspective. In all these forms the conscious learning and change happens only through reflecting and processing.

Conclusions

This article just scratches the surface of what change means and what kind of changes are possible in these four forms. All forms are very flexible and can be used in various settings, and in different settings the characteristics of the forms create different dynamics. Each form creates a potential for change by showing new perspectives but not by forcing change. The change happens only if the participants feel the will and need to change after facing the new realizations.

In all the forms it is possible to learn about yourself and about the theme of the drama. The change that happens comes down to the needs of the participants as well as the goals of the facilitator, and since all the researched forms are flexible, based on this article alone it is impossible to say what form suits what kind of change best. The creative action is very different in each form. In psychodrama the protagonist both creates the world and acts in it. In sociodrama the group co-creates the world and acts in it. In edularps, the writer of the larp creates the world, but the group acts in it, and in Playback Theatre the storyteller creates the world (i.e. tells the story), but others act in it. A possible further research would be about this core difference in the forms: how do the different creative actions relate to change and learning? Another question is, how varying levels and forms of warm-up relate to reaching a spontaneous state, and how they are related to both the creative action and the new cultural conserve. Methods like stimulated recall (Pitkänen, 2015) would make it possible to research what people are experiencing during the action, and maybe then the research question about how these forms contribute to change could be revisited in more detail.

This article focuses on the basics of these forms and is helpful to understand some of the similarities and differences. It also helps to understand something of the relationship of these forms to change: What kind of change can be helped with each form? In which setting could they be used? Hopefully the comparison of the forms also provides new insights into the different forms for both practitioners as well as researchers.

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