

Practitioner research in psychodrama: Strengthening the researcher's role^{*}

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Summary. *Psychodrama research needs practitioners of psychodrama who are interested in sharing their practices and engage as research practitioners in a collaborative research network. The research identities of practitioners – psychodrama trainers, therapists and trainees – are investigated in an ongoing study. Preliminary results suggest that interest in research, research competence and the level of information in research can be seen as differentiating factors. According to the self-report of trainers, trainees and psychodrama therapists, four different research identities can be found: these identities will be described. In the presentation we will suggest, that the results of this study can be a good starting point in reflecting on the status of research in psychodrama. We propose that during psychodrama training, research should receive more attention in the future.*

Key words: *psychodrama research, practitioner research, practice research network, counselling/psychotherapy*

The Federation of European Psychodrama Training Organization (FEPTO) comprises a growing number of psychodrama training and accrediting organizations. The basis for this network was created in 1992. At present 66 training organizations and 9 accrediting organizations from 26 European and Mediterranean countries are members of FEPTO.

Within FEPTO, research has always been a very important element for training and practice of psychodrama. Research is a specific task carried

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out by the Research Committee of FEPTO. However, there is still a gap between the expectations about research – to show what is effective in psychodrama work, how to improve psychodrama for applicability in different fields of practice, and what and how to teach psychodrama effectively.

During the 2008 FEPTO Research Committee meeting in Roriz, Portugal, a social network was created to enhance research in psychodrama. In a subsequent meeting in Edinburgh 2009, the basis for creating research groups within the committee was established. Since that meeting different research projects in psychodrama were initiated and conducted in a cooperative way across different European and Mediterranean countries. In this way a practitioner-research engagement (McDonnell et al., 2012) within an international network of research practitioners in psychodrama was created.

Psychodrama research needs practitioners in psychodrama who are interested in sharing their best practices and engaging as research practitioners in a collaborative research network that exists in other psychotherapeutic modalities (e.g. Castonguay, 2011). Apart from the role of psychodrama director, the role of a researcher has to be developed and fostered even though there is often a negative perception of research in psychotherapy (Felber & Margreiter, 2007; Widdowson, 2012). Several requirements need to be met to enhance practitioner research amongst psychodrama trainers, therapists and trainees:

- to acknowledge that research is important for psychodrama practice;
 - to get information about current research from journals, books and symposia;
 - to engage in research training and to improve knowledge and skills;
 - to participate in research processes;
- to present, publish and share results and experiences of research.

Methodology

In an ongoing study, the research identities of practitioners – psychodrama trainers, therapists and trainees - are investigated. In a self-report questionnaire trainers, practitioners and trainees from different countries can rank 34 statements regarding research in counselling and psychotherapy on a seven-point Likert-scale. The scales comprised aspects like:

- importance/ relevance of research;
- interest in learning and doing research;
- information about research;
- competence in doing research;
- research in training.

The sample which consists of different subsamples included 325 participants. The International trainers at an Annual FEPTO meeting in Oslo, participants of a pre-conference in Oslo, Austrian trainers in a national conference, Austrian and German Trainers, practitioners and trainees who could respond by an online questionnaire were included in the study.

Preliminary results suggest that interest in research, research competence, the level of information in research, and the attention given to research in training can be seen as differentiating factors. According to the self-report of trainers, trainees and psychodrama therapists, four different research identities can be found.

Discussion

According to the self-report of trainers, trainees and psychodrama practitioners four different research identities can be described:

- the research abstinent: psychodramatists who say that research is more or less important, but they describe themselves as not very well informed and competent in research. They express very little interest and tend to avoid research. They see research on average more or less covered in their training;
- the research skeptics: psychodramatists who are more or less interested in research. However, they do not think that research is important for psychodrama practice. They describe themselves as on average informed and competent in research. Research is more or less sufficiently covered in their training;
- the research learner: psychodramatists who see themselves as not very well informed about current research, and they also describe themselves as not having enough competence in research. From their viewpoint research is not well covered in their training. However, they see research not only as very important, but they are also very interested in learning and engaging in research. They would like to acquire competence in research;

- the research practitioner: psychodramatists who see research as important. They describe themselves as interested, competent and well informed about research, and they are also confident that research is covered well enough in their training;

In the presentation we will show how these identities are distributed in different samples of psychodrama trainers, practitioners and trainees. The different subsamples were looked at in detail. The results depict that there is on one hand a considerably strong group who see themselves as well prepared to conduct research or as interested and motivated learners, but on the other hand, we can see that real research experience is not that often reported. The gap between a positive attitude and interest towards research and a lack of real research experience can be interpreted as either resulting from the tendency of just giving socially expected answers or showing a real potential for research which can be developed in the future.

It is suggested that results of this study can be a good starting point to reflect upon the importance of research in different countries or subgroups like trainers, practitioners or trainees. Furthermore, this concept of identities can be one measure to see how trainees during their psychodrama training evolve with regards to research in counselling and psychotherapy.

Results

The results of the study underline that research is seen as a very important element in this profession and there is an interest in learning and participating in research projects within the group of trainers, practitioners and trainees. However, there is still a lack of real research experience and information about research. Furthermore, the self-reports illustrate that for many practitioners research competences have to be improved. Therefore, more opportunities to participate and engage in research activities should be offered.

Conclusion

Results reported above depict that research needs to be incorporated into the training curriculum. If trainees get an opportunity to reflect upon and to learn about psychodrama from the perspective of a researcher, they will

acquire research competences step by step from the beginning of their training.

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