

Reviews

Sociodrama and Collective Trauma

Peter Felix Kellermann

London, Jessica Kingsley, 2007, 192pp

ISBN 9781843104469 (pbk) £18.99/ US\$29.95

On his very opening page, the author tells readers that

The purpose of this book is to describe ... collective manifestations of trauma and how sociodrama may be used with groups that struggle with the after-effects of wars and natural disasters. More than anything else, however, it is an effort to share some thoughts and concerns. (p.7)

This from the author's experiences of leading psychodrama and sociodrama groups for more than 30 years.

The goals are pursued through nine chapters which are prefaced with an introduction and rounded off with final comments.

The Introduction is a rather personal account of the author's rich and varied experiences of sociodrama.

Chapter 1 focuses on Sociodrama. The author explains that 'In contrast to psychodrama, which focuses on individual dynamics, ... Sociodrama was developed as a deep action method for dealing with intergroup relations and collective ideologies' (p.15). The setting and process, major skills, and applications around the world are discussed.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to collective trauma. While no formal definition of collective trauma is offered, many descriptions of it are shared very vividly. The collective responses to such events are described as six phases.

Chapter 3 is called 'Society', which means the healing of a society. The author openly acknowledges that he relies on an 'obsolete' view of society as a living organism, yet - for 'Heuristic purposes', will continue to use it (p.51): a logic that is not entirely easy to follow. His discussion of major issues results in a classification of sociodramatic practices as applied to: Crisis, Political power and equality, Diversity, Conflict

Management and Postconflict reconciliation. At that stage we are told that these are the topics of the following five chapters.

The book ends with thoughts about the history of sociodrama and its future. Then ‘final comments’ from an interview with Zerka Moreno are offered. We are not really told who she is. I happen to know that she is the widow of Jacob Moreno – the founder of psychodrama.

Indeed, it seems to me that this book assumes considerable prior knowledge of psychodrama and psychodramatic techniques, as these are not usually explained but are mentioned very often. While I am very broadly familiar with these techniques I do not consider myself equipped to evaluate the practice that is described. Still, I was taken by the almost poetic quality of some phrases. At times I was not entirely sure what to make of certain all-embracing assertions about therapy, the nature of people and even life itself.

I would have liked to see at least one example of practice that fully follows the stages indicated for it. Also, briefly describing the contents of each chapter in the introduction might have helped.

This is a very compassionate text about human suffering. One way of evaluating a book is to ask whether the author accomplished what he had set out to do. As mentioned at the beginning, this author’s aim was ‘to describe ... collective manifestations of trauma and how sociodrama may be used with groups’ ... particularly his own ‘thoughts and concerns’ about this (p. 7).

Few could argue that the author did not do that.

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Writing For A Change

Boosting literacy and learning through social action

Edited by Kristina Berdan, Ian Boulton, Elyse Eidman-Aadahal, Jennie Fleming, Launie Gardner, Iana Rogers and Asali Solomon

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This is an interesting, useful and well presented edited book which has been collaboratively developed by the National Writing Project (NWP) which is a professional development programme for teachers founded at the University of California, and the Centre for Social Action which is a training, consulting, research and publications unit based at De Montfort University. The NWP has some 200 university-based writing project sites which are dedicated to improving student writing and learning in US schools and views quality education as central for equality and democracy. The Centre for Social Action works 'alongside practitioners, managers and community members in a range of settings, including social work, health, youth work, housing and regeneration', with the aim of achieving positive social change through community development and project and professional development.

The book is divided into three sections. In part one teachers and students describe their experiences with Social Action in the classroom and the community. The chapters in this section illustrate the flexibility and adaptation of Social Action to a wide range of purposes and settings. In part two the authors reflect on these examples and link them with relevant theories, processes and principles and present a series of questions and issues for consideration by practitioners in their work. The final part focuses on providing practical advice and activities for commencing Social Action in various settings.

For the UK reader there is much to be gained from the valuable descriptions and analysis of US school practice which convey the positive outcomes for young people. For example Kristina Berdan a teacher of language arts at a school in Baltimore in Maryland and who works alongside youth workers reflects on the experience of working with Social Action in the classroom and the challenges she met. However the project proved a great success and she states that she has seen young people accomplish more at the age of thirteen than many achieve in a lifetime.

Overall I thought this a timely and inspirational volume that presents and celebrates aspects of work that can assist in working for the empowerment of young people in both the UK and the USA. The practical advice is useful and although not all the book will be of relevance to all practitioners there is enough here to make it a text worth dipping into. Certainly it will interest readers of *Groupwork*. I particularly enjoyed the chapter titled 'Principles for Practice' by Jennie Fleming of the Centre for Social Action, and Ian Boulton who has worked as a trainer and community worker in the UK and in Eastern Europe. This well written, accessible chapter argues that Social Action principles include recognising that all people have skills, experience and understanding that they can draw on to deal with the problems that confront them. Importantly Social Action also recognises that all 'people have rights, including the right to be heard, the right to define the issues facing them, and the right to take action on their own behalf'.

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Copies of *Writing for a Change* can be purchased from De Montfort University at a cost £11.00 +75p second class postage in the UK. Please make Sterling cheques payable to 'De Montfort Expertise Ltd' and send orders to the Centre for Social Action, De Montfort University, Hawthorn Building, the Gateway, Leicester LE1 9BH