Laura Boyett

Professor Faulkner

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Alternative Therapy Using Theatre Techniques

Numerous individuals across the United States of America need therapy in order for them to succeed as a member of society. For many, average therapy sessions that include sitting down and discussing issues with a therapist are not enough to aide in the success of the individual. Alternative therapy methods are becoming increasingly popular and are facing a new frontier in how they are to be implemented. Using theatre techniques as therapy is being proven to be one of the most beneficial kinds of therapy (Socialworker.com, 2014). For an individual that is not in need of therapy, the theatre is a place where numerous talents are utilized in a way that is beneficial to the production of a show. For example, actors are portraying characters with lines and songs written by librettists and composers. They wear costumes designed and sewed by wardrobe crews and hair and makeup that is either done for them or applied themselves. The show takes place on a set that is designed by the set designer and brought to life by light and sound designers and crews. There are dance numbers that have been carefully choreographed for the production and brought to life by the actors and dancers on stage. It is common to find a live band or orchestra at a theatrical production which needs a conductor and instrumentalists. Directors and stage managers are in charge of bringing all of these aspects together to form a production that audience members attend and enjoy. For the individuals involved in these productions they are able to experience and be part of something bigger than themselves and are

in turn given a sense of pride in themselves and what they have accomplished. Actors are able to express emotions in a way that is unique and genuine while they build self-esteem and lower any feeling of isolation that they might have (Socialworker.com, 2014).

Using drama therapy, working professionals are able to help their patients gain the higher self-esteem and express emotions in a healthy way. By introducing a patient to the theatre, they are involving them in a world different than any they have ever known. Patients walk into a theatre and are greeted with rows of seats leading up to a stage. When an actor walks into a theatre for an audition, the process is often times stressful because monologues and audition songs need to be prepared, the auditionee needs to come dressed nicely while also prepared for a dance audition. Sometimes none of those preparations need to be done and the actor is required to do a cold read of a script they have never seen before and work with other auditionees on multiple scenes. The most stressful part of an audition is waiting to hear back from the casting director. Drama therapy eliminates these stressors and is simply allowing patients to work on a stage using theatre techniques.

Drama therapy is a growing new frontier full of possibilities. Many of the goals for drama therapy are to implement the benefactors from theatre into the everyday lives of the patient. Patients that are struggling with a sense of self find themselves portraying a solid character with distinct personality traits and occasionally a built-in back story. While portraying this character the patient is able to then connect with their emotions and identify their own personality traits. Another patient suffering from low self-esteem is encouraged by castmates and other members working on the show. They are able to step in front of a group of people and be applauded for their work, which increases dopamine levels in the brain, leading to an overall positive

experience (goodtherapy.org). These patients are not only emotionally benefitting, they are also gaining new skills such as music literacy, dance skills, and even behind the scenes theatre aspects.

There are also many different kinds of theatre that can be used to aide in drama therapy. American pantomime theatre involves little to none spoken words and relies solely on body movements and facial expressions. This style of theatre allows for patients who are working on verbal issues to start off expressing themselves without having to use their words, providing a stepping stone for eventually using speech on stage in their therapy. Musicals combine all of the aspects of theatre into one production, allowing for a more diverse therapy session. Musicals allow patients to express themselves through song, dance, and even technical positions in the theatre. Straight plays would focus more on diction and emotion in the spoken word. They take away the music and dance, relying on sound effects and the actors for audible stimuli. Patients experiencing straight plays as part of their drama therapy would be able to focus on genuine conversation skills and character development without the added pressure that musicals provide.

Drama therapy as a frontier explores how the general public perceives therapy and the stigma surrounding it. For many individuals therapy is scary and intimidating, there is a general consensus that people who go to therapy are “crazy”. Drama therapy allows for an open and welcoming environment where anyone can attend to expand their interpersonal abilities. Patients seeking help are encouraged to work through issues in a productive way where there is a larger goal to be reached. That goal being the final production of s show the patient was involved in. Being able to see their work come to life and be successful increases the likelihood of implementing the strategies they have learned into their daily lives.

With any new frontier, drama therapy comes with negative issues that inhibit the ability to expand and grow the idea of alternative forms of therapy. Theatre comes with drama between the cast and crew of a show, lines get dropped, entrances into a scene are missed, and shows can go poorly. These negative aspects of theatre would only work to prohibit and endanger a patient’s path to overcome their reason for therapy. Challenges arrive when the individual is unable to step onto the stage or be in front of a group of people before they are prepared to handle these actions. Preparation is required for both the professional and their patient before jumping straight in. This results in a lengthy process for a small portion of individuals with extreme social anxieties and issues.

Frontiers are new fields being studied, explored, and tested. Similar to Father Jean Marie Latour in Willa Cather’s *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, drama therapy as a whole is faced with many challenges moving forward. Latour has crossed rocky terrain and has shown great perseverance in order to overcome the desert landscape, in his journey he meets a woman named Magdalena who aids in protecting him. She warns Latour of the serial killer she lives with and in return is protected from him. Magdalena shows strength and bravery, which in drama therapy is a trait that would help expand the field. Using the traits of Magdalena, professionals working to expand the use of drama therapy would be able to pitch their ideas to larger companies, books could be written on the topic, news articles have the possibility to become readily available to social media sites, and the stigma surrounding therapy would be worked through. A patient who concludes that they need therapy would have the strength to admit that to another individual and have courage to go. Magdalena played a small role on her frontier; however she is important and vital to the story line and would be equally as necessary in expanding the frontier of alternative therapy using theatre techniques.

Latour would be a driving force in the world of drama therapy. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop,* Latour takes a long journey and loses most of his supplies, he finds himself in situations throughout the story where he could have given up hope and quit. However, he stayed determined and was able to complete his journey from Ohio to New Mexico. In drama therapy, patients might not respond to treatment right away, different methods work for different individuals, and trial and error is currently how professionals are determining what works and what is unsuccessful. Latour’s intelligence would prove to be an attribute to the world of drama therapy. Using his personal strengths, he would be able to inform the public and persuade them about how beneficial this new frontier to individuals with therapy needs.

Each and every frontier has unique details and contributors with an overall goal of changing and or improving an aspect of life. Some frontiers explore unknown lands, while others are working to expand modern medicine. Exploration today is vastly different than what it was pictured as a hundred years ago, using modern technology today does not look the same as riding through unknown lands on horseback. These technological advances are working hard to create an “easier” world to live in. This leaves one question that has yet to be answered, “Is society really going to benefit from these new ideas and explorations?” Arguments against technological, space, and even medical frontiers state that the point at which the line is crossed and too many advances are made is unclear and asks, “When is enough, enough?” Alternative therapy using theatre techniques is less controversial, aiming to benefit the mental health of society. While there is still much progress to be made, the frontier of drama therapy is growing quickly and is benefitting more patients every day. Patients develop the life skills that are necessary to function in a modern American society with the confidence to keep their good habits throughout their lifetime.

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