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## **Modern British Drama as a central dramatherapeutic tool in counseling in Adult Education and Life-Long Learning: Strengthening social skills through groups of creative expression.**

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### **Abstract**

The present study focuses on the implementation of multicultural counseling in Adult Education and Life Long Learning through drama therapy. The main Dramatherapeutic tool is original textual extracts from Modern British Drama plays. Its main interest lies in developing cultural sensitivity and increasing intercultural dialogue.

## **1. Introduction**

The present study attempts to explore the importance of counseling as a tool of empowerment in the field of adult education with culturally diverse population. More specifically, counseling as it is used in this study draws from drama therapy techniques that make extensive use of textual extracts from Modern British Drama plays.

The research methodology used is based on qualitative research methods and on action and intervention research in particular. The aim is to form two groups of culturally diverse adults one in the region of Thrace and one in Athens, who attend a continuous education programme aiming at social inclusion. The groups will be supported by 12 counseling sessions with the use of drama therapy techniques, in order to develop cultural sensitivity, to increase intercultural dialogue and to empower group members towards continuous education. The emphasis lays on strengthening their social skills so as to facilitate the establishment of a more stable and lengthier relationship with the educational processes. Furthermore, an attempt will be made to assess the plausibility of the implementation of a counseling- through- art and creative expression group model, in the field of Adult Education especially for vulnerable or culturally different social groups.

At present, a pilot study is being conducted with a group of social work students aiming at sensitizing them towards diversity and intercultural dialogue. This group has been selected mainly because social workers are professionals who work with culturally diverse population. The main goal of the intervention has been to strengthen their social skills, their cultural sensitivity and help them develop counseling skills for culturally diverse population through the arts and creative expression.

The present paper mainly focuses on presenting briefly the theoretical perspectives on which this study is based, that is, counseling with the use of drama-therapy and artistically expressive techniques. It also focuses on the importance of the use of extracts from Modern British Drama plays which have been selected because of their vibrant connection with today's social issues that acts as a platform for social dialogue and sensitization.

## **2. Theoretical framework of the study**

Modern societies are characterized by fast socio-economic developments, constantly changing balances of the global political scenery and excessive population mobility, both legal and illegal, either due to war or, as a result of an effort to seek better living conditions. These characteristics seem to have exerted their influence on education amongst other areas as well. During the past years the impact of these changes has overwhelmed the field of education, which struggles to adapt to the new circumstances and meet the new requests successfully. It is becoming evident now that globalization asserts that knowledge, like economy, tends to have no country of origin (Μπρούζος, Ράπτη, 2001)

Greece in particular, has been affected by this change of dynamics on all levels of its social, economic and cultural life. Because of the dramatic changes that have been taking place all over the world, it has been hosting interchangeably waves of refugees and immigrants. (Νικολάου, 2000)

The present study draws its frame of reference from three distinct, yet relevant fields of interest: Adult Education and Life-Long Learning and Multicultural

Counseling and Modern British Drama. The theory and practice of drama therapy is summoned as a means of intervention that also acts as a mediator between the three aforementioned fields, providing them with a potential space where they can come to a close encounter with one another and get engaged in a fruitful dialogue and mutual support. Modern British Drama with especially selected texts, thematically coherent to the issues to be addressed in the group sessions, is adopted as the main dramatherapeutic tool of the process.

i) *Adult Education and Life-Long Learning*

Adult Education and Life-long Learning are terms that bear a historical significance of their own (Yaxlee, 1929), yet have only recently been introduced to Greek educational reality; moreover, they relate to an educational field that is primarily influenced by the impact of recent changes. They are required to operate in such a way so as to suffice in supporting adults who return to education for any reason, promote knowledge and self-exploration, and prove to be flexible enough in order to function effectively in various environments, under all sorts of circumstances. For the time being, people tend to be relatively hesitant towards it and that is why it is claimed that Adult Education and Life-long Learning need to be approached in a holistic manner and not be dealt with as a means to invigorate work force only. (Atanasova, 2006). According to this view the focal points of a new approach towards Adult Education and Life Long Learning should entail a change of mentality and a stable social policy that will encourage citizens to cultivate their knowledge and develop their skills. (Atanasova, 2004).

Multicultural education and Life- Long Learning aim to assist in the transition of a single-cultural society, like Greece is, to a multicultural one. (Φώτου, 2002, Ζωγράφου, 2003). Since the 10% of Greek population are already economic immigrants (Μπεζάτη, Θ. & Θεοδοσοπούλου, Μ., 2006) it is evident that Adult Education and Life-Long Learning are exposed to multiculturalism. It has been claimed that the main aim of Multicultural education is the enhancement of those qualities that will contribute to the peaceful and constructive coexistence of people of different cultural origins in the same social framework. (Παπάς, 1997) Therefore Multicultural education addresses two issues simultaneously: The first one is to provide minority groups with the necessary skills and knowledge in order for them to adapt to a new environment without major problems. The second is to facilitate the majority in accepting minority groups and overcome prejudice and negative reactions. In this perspective learning is characterised more as an act of self- exploration and self- actualization, than as a mere intake of information provided by the environment. (Rogers, 1999)

ii) *Multicultural Counselling and Drama Therapy*

Counselling is primarily about promoting and developing understanding. Erikson (1968) claimed that, acquiring a sense of self and identity and seeking self-knowledge is of utmost importance. Culture is considered to be the common attitudes and behaviours that a group of people share and practice. It is important, however, to clarify that it does not refer to cultural or national heritage only but it is also shaped by other factors such as age, sex and sexual preferences, way of life and particular socioeconomic status. That is why counsellors cannot ignore the issue of culture (Corey, 1991). Respectively, theorists like Appleton (1983) hold the opinion that one

should first deal with his own cultural and national background before examining other peoples. Extensive writing has been done concerning multicultural counselling, in an attempt to define its characteristics, effectiveness and boundaries. (Pedersen 1988, Thomson & Rudolph 1992, Ivey 1987, Sue & Sue 1997, Ponderotto & Benesch, 1988). It seems, however that researchers agree on the fact that there is no ideal approach to multicultural counselling. Corey (1990) stresses the fact that it is not necessary for the counsellor to have the same experiences with the members of the group. The aim rather lies in trying to open up and share feelings. He also pinpoints that it is more because of our differences and less because of our resemblances that we tend to attend more closely to our behaviour.

In the present study, Drama Therapy with its theoretical and practical framework is regarded as the vehicle, through which Adult Education and Multi-cultural counselling will connect to one another and promote a necessary dialogue. It needs to be clarified that the present research proposes a short-term group intervention, whose main aim is empowerment. Any therapeutic requests that may arise will be dealt on a here-and-now basis in a creative, dramatherapeutic manner and up to the extent that such a short-term process allows. The basic dramatherapeutic tool to be used is a body of texts from theatrical plays of Modern British Drama.

Drama therapy emerged as a separate field and took its place amongst the rest of arts therapies like dance, music, play and art therapy. Its theoretical roots are to be traced in theatre, therapeutic drama, psychology and anthropology and through the years it has made use of techniques and methods from the fields of psychotherapy, arts and culture and anthropological sciences in order to evolve into a distinct therapeutic method. Drama therapy does not possess a concrete, uniformed theoretical basis, neither predetermined structures that govern its implementation and training; it is rather characterised by a variety of practices that primarily stem from creativity, synthesis and eclecticism (Jennings et als, 1994). The present study will be based on the theatrical model introduced by Sue Jennings (1990). She suggests that Drama therapy is a means through which persons and groups can accomplish change, when they come to an empirical, first hand contact with theatre art. The three stages that she proposes, *embodiment-projection-role* are at the heart of the dramatherapeutic session. Dramatic distancing is a key feature and becomes the paradox of drama therapy that enables persons to come closer to hidden, sensitive parts of themselves and deal more effectively with hurt or repressed feelings (Jennings, 1992).

The dramatherapeutic sessions that will take place during this study will focus mainly on making use of excerpts from original theatrical plays. Therefore, the basic dramatherapeutic tool will be actual literary texts that will serve a dual purpose: Firstly, they will give group members a sense of belonging to a bigger group, since theatrical plays are addressed to everybody. Through dramatic distance, therefore, they will feel safe enough to enact on personal issues bearing in mind that personal material is kind of connected to something much wider and relates to the outer world and human experience (Jennings, 1994). Secondly, they will act as a potential space, where according to Winnicott's psychodynamic approach (Winnicott, 1971), the members of the group can enjoy the qualities of *holding* and *containment* and therefore feel trust in order to proceed to more personal processes with safety. The text itself, the therapist and the group form the boundaries within which the members of the group can delve in, process and resolve the issues they work on (Jenkyns, 1996).

### iii) *Modern British Drama*

The present study aspires in introducing Modern British Drama with a focus on plays written after 1990's in particular, as a central dramatherapeutic tool in the fields of Counseling and Adult Education. It has been specifically chosen for a number of reasons some of which are the following: Theatre in England is still a writer's theatre and not a director's one. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century it has been baptized in new facts, the major ones been two World Wars and the social changes they brought about. England has had to re examine its situation, now with the complete loss of a colonialist's identity, the increasing urbanization and fast technological advances. New theories such as Marxism and recently Feminism, endowed playwriting with a political, social and cultural dimension and playwrights have strengthened their voice which is now heard clearly. It seems that 20<sup>th</sup> century British Drama has become a platform for social dialogue and controversy despite the overwhelming influence of Mass media. (Innes, 2002). Even from the 60's Modern British Drama has been called *sweeping* (Wandor, 2001, p. 241). It has been and still is quite a fertile, multifarious field bearing its own dynamics. Various trends like *Theatre of Catastrophe* (Barker, 1997), or *In-Yer-Face Theatre* (Sierz, 2000) converse with the theatre that articulates contemporary political thought, as well as alternative theatre forms that aim at cultural intervention (Kershaw, 1999). Another reason for adopting Modern British Drama as a central dramatherapeutic tool is its wide spectrum of topics. Family relations, mother, sexuality, male and female identity, private and public space, female and male representations, political and private life converse with the issues of violence, immigration, alienation, physical and mental illness, addictions, poverty and search for meaning or the opposite.

The underlying idea behind choosing Modern British Drama as a central Dramatherapeutic tool in the present study has been that the issues it deals with, are estimated to be the same exact issues that concern, to a bigger or lesser extend, the members of a counseling group in the field of Adult Education and Life- Long Learning, particularly a multicultural one.

### **3. Aims of the research**

The main aim of the present research is to enquire whether the use of group counseling with drama therapy techniques may enhance the social skills and empower and strengthen bonds with education of adults who participate in Adult Education and Life- Long Learning especially of those who belong to ethnic minority groups, particularly through counseling groups of creative expression that use as a main dramatherapeutic tool modern British drama. It will make use of improvisations, role-playing, storytelling, theatrical play and artistic expression inspired by and based on original texts of theatrical plays, in order to facilitate the transition of a personal story into an artistic event through aesthetic distancing. It aspires that through this particular process, the self- esteem of the people involved in Adult- Education and Life- long Learning will rise and this will encourage them towards greater engagement both in quality and duration in the educational field. Evaluation of the present research, once this is concluded, perhaps will highlight the formulation of a counseling- dramatherapeutic model that functions in a fruitful dialogue with Modern British Theatre and will examine the perspective of introducing it in the field of Adult Education and Life- Long Learning. It is probable that the interaction of the three

different principles, those of Modern British Theatre, Adult Education and Counseling brought together with the assistance of Drama Therapy will provide a flexible, multicultural, short- term counseling model operating on dramatherapeutic principles and characteristics that will aid the empowerment of the participants and as a result strengthen their relation with Education and Learning. Moreover, it may prove quite useful as a means of sensitizing and training in certain issues professionals who are involved in other humanistic professions such as social and health workers, teachers etc., in an experiential way that will complement classroom instruction.

#### **4. The research**

The present study is an action research, based on qualitative methodology and makes use of its qualitative tools such as in-depth interviews, and detailed recording of group processes. Content analysis will take place through analyzing the content of the detailed recordings so as to primarily accentuate the views of people who are interviewed and/ or participate. Respectively, it will attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of the particular group drama therapy interventions in Adult Education and Life- Long learning, and whether these can contribute to the particular field as an empowering tool.

Initially it has taken the form of a pilot study being conducted with social work students in the Department of Social Administration, in Democritus University of Thrace. It is looking forward to explore whether Modern British Drama as a central dramatherapeutic tool in group counseling setting can pay any contribution to prospective professionals training and more particularly to the enhancement of empathy, personal skills development, cultural sensitivity and intercultural dialogue. The pilot study includes five open Drama Therapy sessions and ten closed sessions for those participants who signed a therapeutic contract. The group is facilitated by the researcher and meets on a regular fortnight basis. After the completion of the last session the group members will be asked for an interview which will not be conducted by the facilitator. Once the material is collected, analyzed and evaluated, the main part of the research will be initiated. Two multicultural groups of ten Adult Education students will be chosen in Athens, most probably amongst those who have taken up learning Greek or English as a foreign language, one as an intervention and the other as a control group. Likewise, two similar groups will be formed in Thrace and once permission from the relevant authorities is granted the participants will be invited for an interview. Then, they will attend the one- hour and a half counseling group that will take place weekly until a number of twelve sessions is completed. At the end of each session there will be an analytical recording of the session. In case the participants allow it, sessions will be videotaped, otherwise there will be an assistant participant observant present who will record the session in detail. After the completion of the group meetings, the participants will be asked for an interview again. The tools of structured and in- depth interviews (Dunn, 2000) will help in assessing the perception of each participant concerning his self-esteem, his motives and his attitude towards education and estimate whether and to what extent these were changed after the completion of the counseling group. Content analysis will be based on the participants' views and the facilitator's interventions during group work. There will be an attempt to denote the parameters through the research for evaluating the intervention. Data analysis will relate mainly to process research.

## 5. Present phase of the research

Currently, the present phase of the research is towards the end of the pilot study which has been taking place since October 2010 in Komotini, Thrace and is expected to end at the end of May 2011. The main aim of the pilot study has been the training in an experiential way of future social workers in issues that are taught academically at University. It looks forward to implementing future professionals' preparation on issues of empathy on sensitive matters and acceptance of differences through artistic and creative group work. It entails a group of third and fourth-year Social Work students of the Department of Social Administration in Democritus University of Thrace who initially attended a series of five Dramatherapy open sessions and then opted for another series of ten sessions. The main reason for choosing Social Work students to participate in the pilot research has been mainly the fact that empowerment will be the aim of their prospect professional interventions as well as that they will work to a great extent with individuals of culturally different backgrounds. The group takes place on a weekday, every fortnight on University premises and lasts for two hours approximately. The first five sessions opted to familiarize students with Drama Therapy and its tools. In the sessions that followed, the main dramatherapeutic tool to be used was extracts from plays of Modern British Drama. In particular an extract from the monologue *An educated lady* by Alan Bennet and extracts from Brian Friel's plays *Faith Healer* and *Translations*, David Hare's *Skylight*, Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* and *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* and Caryl Churchill's *Far Away*. The main axe underpinning the drama therapy group work has been familiarizing oneself with what is the least familiar, the foreign, the strange, the different, what seems alien. In this perspective each text introduced each time a different central theme to deal with in a dramatherapeutic way, such as immigration, education, language, body awareness, violence, mental and physical diseases, and addictions. After the completion of the group sessions, the group members will be invited for an interview in order to evaluate the group process and estimate if and in what ways their involvement in the group facilitated them towards developing more cultural sensitivity, empathy and understanding, whether it enriched in any way their personal and professional skills and whether they think that the implementation of such a counseling group in the field of Adult Education and Life-Long Learning would be an asset in the attempts towards the empowerment of adult students.

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