

## Implementing Tele'Drama During the Pandemic

### Desarrollos del Tele'Drama durante la pandemia



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#### Abstract

This article aims to offer an overview of Tele'Drama and its pioneering role in implementing action and experiential methods via online communication during pandemic. The main author of this article is also the creator of the method and believes that Tele'Drama is a particularly important part of the future of action methods, connecting people from various cultures, locations and time zones. Tele'Drama is offering a solution to people in various physical conditions and/or with limited travel capability, creating opportunities for inclusion by increasing equity in receiving mental health, and providing educational services, support groups and social events regardless of one's circumstances.

#### Key words

Tele'drama, Psychodrama, Sociometry, Action Methods, Online

#### Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo ofrecer una visión general del Tele'Drama y su papel pionero en el desarrollo de los métodos experienciales y de acción a través de la comunicación en línea durante la pandemia. La autora principal de este artículo es también la creadora del método y cree firmemente que el Tele'Drama es una parte particularmente importante del futuro de los métodos de acción, que conecta a personas de diversas culturas, lugares y zonas horarias. El Tele'Drama ofrece así una solución a personas con diversas dificultades físicas y/o con capacidad limitada para viajar, favoreciendo las oportunidades de inclusión social, incrementando el reparto equitativo de la salud mental, y proporcionando servicios educativos, grupos de apoyo y reuniones sociales con independencia de las circunstancias individuales.

#### Palabras clave

Tele'drama, Psicodrama, Sociometría, Métodos De Acción, En Línea

### INTRODUCTION

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, online conferencing formats, such as those offered by Zoom, have been the primary if not only possible option available to conduct meetings, therapy sessions and training since February 2020. Tele'Drama is a method for offering action and expressive methods training, therapy, counseling, and other interventions using an online video conferencing approach. Created as a method and coined as a term by Daniela Simmons, Tele'Drama has been gradually developed through experimentation and application since Fall 2017. The term "Tele'Drama" (with an apostrophe between 'tele' and 'drama'), was created to provide an original meaning. Its etymology comes from the Greek *têle* (Τηλε), "at a distance" and *drama* (δρᾶμα) "action." The apostrophe between 'tele' and 'drama' indicates the presence of various action methods offered at the institute: Psychodrama, Sociometry, Sociodrama, Bibliodrama, Playback Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, Dynamic Theatre, Dramatic Multiplication, Expressive Therapies (including Dance and Movement, Art, Drama, Poetry, Music Therapy, Organizational Consulting, Supervision, etc.)

Moreno believed that "a truly therapeutic procedure must have no less objective than the whole of mankind" (Moreno, 1953, p. 1). His main philosophical concept was on the aim of implementing Sociatry – the healing of the societies (Moreno, Z., 2006). As an innovative expansion of Moreno's methodologies of international psychodrama, sociometry, and sociatry, Tele'Drama supports his goal of the healing of societies. The uniqueness of Tele'Drama as a method lies in its ability to create and engage both global community and generate a transformative global culture. Tele'Drama nurtures a global community based on characteristics such as mutual respect, reciprocity, trustworthiness, and empathy.



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Moreno implemented motion pictures and television to apply psychodrama in the treatment of married couples, families, and groups (Moreno & Fischel, 1942, p.7). Working at Saint Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington DC, Moreno did psychodrama group work on television (Moreno, Z. 1968, p.106). In 1964 at the Camarillo California State Hospital, Moreno was televised conducting psychodrama sessions weekly on closed circuit TV (Moreno, 2006, pp. 1453-a–1454). In 1966 he conducted a seminar at the State Hospital in Pueblo, Colorado, and asked his psychodrama session to be televised on closed circuit TV as a teaching module for the hospital staff (Moreno, Z. 1968, p.109). Another psychodrama session utilizing closed circuit television took place at the Southern Florida State Hospital in 1968. Z. Moreno wrote, "Psychodrama on the television screen becomes an excellent introduction to the psychodramatic method" (1968, p. 175). Hare and Hare (1996), noted that, "Moreno recommends the use of television, motion pictures, and simultaneous psychodramatic re-trials in many parts of the world to make a mass co-experience possible" (p. 63). Moreno (1963), defined Telephone Therapy and wrote, "If the technologist can replace the 'audio telephone' with a 'video telephone,' the patient and therapist could not only hear but also see each other in action" (p. 117)

Marcia Karp, an early student of Moreno and a prominent international psychodrama trainer, remembers Moreno saying in the 1960's that, "One day we could share situations all over the world by simply pressing a button. A fisherman in Norway, for example, could share his family dilemma about his son, with a father in Japan who has a similar issue" (November 2019, personal communication)

Moreno was often visiting people's homes, directing psychodrama with an entire family and any visiting friends (Zuretti, 2020, personal communication). In the virtual world of Zoom online meeting rooms, facilitators lead groups in an imaginative process of visiting each other's homes, seeing the participants' video images on the screen as windows into a different part of the world and individuals' homes.

Moreno believed that the psychological truth is often more real to people than the factual events that occur, because that is their truth, from their perspective. He defined this interpretation as poetical or psycho-dramatic truth because this truth is the only one existing, according to Moreno, in human consciousness. Moreno (1965), wrote that psychodrama includes experiences "beyond reality," or what he termed "surplus reality." The surplus reality is a "gain" for the protagonist who is able to bring to the psychodrama stage imaginary scenes, images and people (p. 211). According to Zerka Moreno, in the reality of our lives there are "invisible dimensions" that we have not been able to completely express or experience (Blomkvist, Rutzel, & Z. Moreno, 2000, pp. 212-213). In Zoom meeting rooms, directors help group members explore the invisible dimensions of their virtual space and their images as holding space therein.

Moreno (1965), believed that psychodrama and other action methods "brings the entire cosmos into play" (p. 211). This concept applies to the virtual reality of the online sessions, where the participants can be physically located thousands of miles apart, but psychologically are together in the same meeting space, involved simultaneously "into (the) play." Implementing psychodrama and other action methods online is beyond time, including people from various time zones; and does not depend on a certain physical location, but on the creation of group cohesion in the virtual space.

## VIRTUAL MEETING PLATFORM

Zoom is a popular virtual platform that is often used to conduct meetings, webinars, and workshops. There is an array of digital tools for both the user and the facilitator of the Tele'Drama. The assortment of options provides opportunities for the participants to actively engage throughout the entire process. Breakout rooms, chat, whiteboards with annotation, virtual backgrounds, filters, and screen sharing are standard tools the facilitator can use to ensure everyone is welcomed to participate. Breakout rooms are optimal for providing intimate small group discussions or opportunities for every applicant to practice engaging in an activity or performing a skill. The time allocated for an activity can be modified to adhere to a specific time frame. Also, the participants can be manually or automatically assigned into groups by the facilitator, and the facilitator can move effortlessly from room to room. The chat area and annotation tools are effective communication methods that support participants to voice their feelings and ideas in an organized, non-disruptive manner, and where an open exchange of communication is available at all times. It also provides an alternative method of contact for participants who cannot express themselves vocally using their microphones. The option to have virtual backgrounds in lieu of having participants personal space in view, serves several purposes. Virtual backgrounds give participants a sense of control in determining if they want to provide others access to their personal environment or to have it remain hidden and private. The virtual backgrounds can also be used as a resource to disseminate information or as a tool used to promote spontaneity and creativity.

In Tele'Drama, technology literacy can make a dramatic difference in the flow and overall experience for the facilitator and the participants. The facilitator should determine which resources could be easily implemented in the workshop. The facilitator should allocate time to instruct participants on using specific foundational tools such as screen sharing, gallery view, side by side view, hiding non-participants view, and accessing breakout rooms if given the option.

Zoom is continuously updating and adding resources to provide more adaptable online learning environments. A recent Zoom update allows facilitators to control the placement of their participants' video images on the screen. A facilitator can place the participants' video images to appear side by side in the frame, as well as "spotlight" specific participants. Both options give other participants the illusion that the selected participants are on stage and helps to direct the groups' focus. This is especially effective when directing psychodramas

or improvisational scenes. Another recent upgrade is the immersion option. This tool is useful for enhancing participants' perception of being a part of the same setting, the environment where their images are portrayed. It is a powerful tool for evoking playfulness and imagination.

## TELE'DRAMA FROM A WORKSHOP FACILITATOR PERSPECTIVE

It is essential to have an outline as a guide for any Tele'Drama workshop. The design contains information about the overall structure and purpose of the workshop. It is used to identify the learning objectives or expected outcomes of the session, the implementation of activities, and the duration of the session. Another crucial aspect to consider when planning a Tele'Drama workshop are the participants. That is, preparing content relative to their needs and considering how the participants can access the content provided in the workshop. Participants' access to the content is partially dependent on their knowledge and experience using virtual platform tools.

Facilitators must decide if it will be beneficial to email participants a document that briefly explains the format of the workshop and what resources the participants will need to participate. Also, participants have their individual ways of expressing and experiencing personal and collective narratives, so it is vital to establish contact with every participant before and at the beginning of the Tele'Drama session. It is advantageous to email participants a disclaimer about risks, confidentiality, self-care, and the care for others. Also, sending reminders about the upcoming Tele'Drama workshop will remind participants of the event and increase the likeliness of attendance. Information on how to join and participate in the workshop is provided in the body of both emails.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES & EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Experiential and didactic learning are two structural formats used in Tele'Drama workshops. At times, Tele'Drama workshops are learning environment in which a concept is explained, with opportunities for participants to practice performing the associated skills, strategically combining theory and application. Other times, workshops focus on encouraging participants to take developmental risks by actively engaging in experimental learning to expand personal awareness or healing. An experiential Tele'Drama session uses expressive arts and action methods to help participants gain personal insight and skill development through active application, meaningful reflection, and objective analysis of the group's whole learning experience.

The overall time frame of the Tele'Drama session is impacted by the format and length of time allocated to engage in action method approaches. There are additional factors to consider when a Tele'Drama session is primarily experiential. The duration of time allotted for the session warm-up, main learning activity, and closure should also include time for transitioning between activities and processing what occurred; participants should be given ample time to share their experience of engaging in action method activities and ask questions to further their understanding. The session pacing should also provide time for the facilitator and other group members to "hold the space," providing a safe enough structure for participants to experience emotional catharsis.

### SAFETY IN TELE'DRAMA TRAINING SESSIONS

The Tele'Drama sessions are programmed for events to be collaborative, with all participants able to see everyone in attendance. The Tele'Drama modules are experiential, wherein group members have the opportunity to warm up, apply action techniques and share their experience, complete group projects and, in general, work in an environment as close as possible to one in a physical space. Safety is most important in directing action methods sessions, from appropriate Zoom meeting settings and technology to ethical and procedural recommendations for handling sessions, as well as safely and professionally directing and responding to the group's dynamics and individual member's catharses.

The Tele'Drama modules are influenced by the group dynamics. Working with online groups is a process that needs to be similar to working with groups in the physical space. Individuals might be sharing information in their group that is sensitive and personal, and it is important that they feel comfortable in the online environment; therefore, group members are asked to agree to a confidentiality requirement in online group sessions.

The groups at the Tele'Drama institute are multicultural. Respect for cultural and individual (and role) differences are critical, including those differences based on age, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, disability, language and communication, and socioeconomic status. Participants are asked to attend while using a quiet and safe place with no other people present in their immediate physical space. Video cameras need to be on (i.e., "unmuted") during the entire session for better cohesion, confidentiality, closeness and connection between the members, and for director's ability to observe and handle possible abreactions among the group members.

To help group members feel safe when emotions are aroused, participants are invited to create a "comfort place," where they can take care of their physical needs and sit comfortably. Frequent reminders to breathe and relax also help participants stay present and engaged and promote their sense of wellbeing during the virtual meeting.

### WORKSHOP ENGAGEMENT

The facilitator is responsible for creating a welcoming environment. An inviting and receptive environment helps participants feel at ease, especially when they also sense it will be a safe environment for learning. Preparing a brief confidentiality statement is an effective way to convey that participants' privacy is valued. Providing information about the purpose of the session, the format, and expectations also assists in creating a safe structure, so that participants feel comfortable. Additionally, the process in which participants introduce themselves contributes to the socioemotional climate of the session. Honesty, trust, and self-exploration that helps foster a sense of security among the group members, can be achieved as participants introduce themselves using sociometry activities. These informal observations measure the interpersonal relationships in a group.

Sociometric introductions help develop a positive atmosphere by directing the group's focus on the commonalities between those present rather than highlighting their differences, thus promoting a sense of inclusion, and diminishing the potential for exclusion. Participants move away from self-conscious and self-critical analysis and move toward self-awareness and change. Sociometry activities, such as improvisational and playful greetings or visual representations, are commonly used to ignite participants' spontaneity, willingness, and self-permission to respond and participate in the creative processes that, in turn, can provide insightful observation and self-evaluation.

The warm-up phase is essential for preparing participants to respond, become vulnerable, and share their feelings and perspectives with others. The selection of action-method activities used during the introduction lays the foundation for developing group cohesiveness and participants' permission to engage in spontaneity and embodied expression from a safe and aesthetic distance. Movement is an effective method to support participants in becoming adequately prepared to engage emotionally in the main learning activity, the purpose of the workshop. Movement activities allow the participants to sense and communicate their emotions without being overwhelmed or under-distanced. The use of virtual ambiances

(atmosphere of a place), and improvisational role reversal activities also help participants to be present and in the moment. The warm-up invites participants to experience the art of play, the enjoyment of performing behaviors using images, symbols, and other vivid communicative methods. Metaphors and role-playing are implemented to spark imagination and expression. For example, as participants take time to introduce themselves from the role of an object or share a movement and sound that expresses how they feel in the moment, they are intuitively checking in with their feelings and slowly releasing tensions and worries, thereby opening to the possibility of experiencing something new.

The main activity is designed to help participants learn specific action methods, such as psychodrama. The main learning activity helps the group investigate and gain insight into their lives. Through enacting different roles, participants explore, reflect, and process their feelings, ideas, and behaviors. In Tele'Drama workshops, there are readily available resources to support the process. Available resources include any materials participants have on hand that they can potentially use to express their feelings and experiences. Within the virtual environment, participants can use and share musical resources, art materials, and other tangible items that can be used as a form of expression or symbolic representation. Additional resources provided by the facilitator may include images, PowerPoint presentations, and handouts. The graphical images create an atmosphere that ignites participants' imaginations. The resources are prompts for further exploration in an action method approach. The facilitator can also use PowerPoint presentations and handouts to disseminate information and share theoretical concepts. Other resources include the tools embedded within the virtual platform, such as Zoom's filters. There are also technological applications available on websites that provide access to additional tools traditionally used in in-person face-to-face action method approaches. One such resource implemented during a recent Tele'Drama workshop was a virtual sand tray.

Finally, the facilitator brings the session to a close by offering an activity that helps the participants reflect on what they experienced in the session. The transition into closing a workshop can potentially be a sensitive process, so it is important to consider the best possible closure prompt that would benefit the group's needs. It can be as simple as asking the participants to share a word or phrase that captures their experiences or insights. Participants may be offered a time to process their experience by asking questions within the group or of the facilitator. A description of their experiences can be illustrated by using their bodies to reflect their sentiments.

As a gift from the facilitator to the group, images that foster a sense of comfort, hope, or empowerment can be displayed. Whatever closing activity is chosen, the aim is to allow the participants to express how some aspects of the workshop benefited them, and concretize the learning they have acquired. That is, what resonated with them? What do they want to take away from the experience or leave behind because it is no longer helpful to them? What new skills or concepts do they want to implement in their professional or personal lives?

### TELE'DRAMA FROM A PARTICIPANT'S POINT OF VIEW

One of the co-authors of this article, a psychodrama trainer from Germany, contributed to it by writing her reflections as a participant at Tele'Drama training modules since the beginning of Pandemic. In March 2020, when most of the countries in Europe went into lockdown due to Covid-19, many psychodramatists were faced with the reality that in-person meetings would not be possible for the foreseeable future. Soon, some interested psychodrama directors were looking into the possibility of online psychodrama. When the German Psychodrama Association (DFP) posted a link to the Tele'Drama website, this trainer discovered that there was someone who already had experience using action methods online. In an international group she could see how other directors work, where there was much diversity and combined knowledge, and she was presented with a lot of possibilities. At first, she participated in practical "how to do psychodrama online" sessions and learned a variety of applications that she integrated in her online work in Germany. In learning how to use action methods online, she faced various challenges, such as getting to know the software, being prepared for Internet troubles, safety issues and creating a trusting environment where participants can open up. She discovered that Tele'Drama had already established protocols for these challenges and could help her continue training her students during this "lockdown" environment.

The participant shares: "I was in awe of the creativity of the presentations, the warmth and openness of directors and the group members, and the safe environment. Even through camera, the directors had an open eye for the group process and each individual. If the director thought someone needed help, she/he would reach out even after the session and make sure everyone was ok".

This participant-trainer realized that working online brings the world together as distance is no longer an obstacle. She enjoyed the benefit of meeting and working with colleagues from various cultures. When practicing



with her own groups in Germany, she felt that being in their own space gave her, as a trainer, and her trainees more confidence to speak and express themselves, and that now she had the opportunity to work with new groups from diverse backgrounds. Beginning as a participant, this psychodrama colleague has chosen the Tele'Drama method as an important part of her future career, being a certified practitioner and is now a trainer through the Tele'Drama institute.

### REPORT ON ONE OF THE TELE'DRAMA INTERVENTIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Although the beginnings of Tele'Drama dates back to 2017, it has gained considerable notice during the pandemic of 2020 and 2021, mostly in relation to its active response to the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic. Tele'Drama systematically implemented both field and research projects prioritizing the needs and distress of individuals and groups affected by the pandemic.

Tele'Drama's master team engaged in a wide scope of activities, both directly and indirectly and in line with its international vision and mission, through initiating collaborative teams of multicultural and multidisciplinary psychodramatist colleagues. Throughout the rise and persistence of the pandemic, mental health professionals listened to people who were in fear and distress. They were confronted with grief while working with individuals and families affected by ailments and deaths brought on by the virus. They took part in public mental health interventions; they were there to support healthcare staff who battled, and are still battling, on the frontlines against the Covid-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, they also had to take care of their regular clients. However, when it came to self-care and caring for significant others, mental health professionals did not seem to fare well and were observed to be prone to secondary traumatization.

Tele'Drama initiated a long-term group titled *Community Field Project for Helping the Helper: Bring Yourself and Your Cup of Coffee with You*, which was designed specifically to target the mental health community in Turkey. The no-cost online group connected mental health professionals, brought them together for a cup of coffee (a meaningful ritual in Turkish culture), share their feelings, and receive support from each other. It held the promise of creative play in the surplus reality (added reality); a most meaningful way to prevent burnout and traumatization.

This online emotional support group project started as a pilot in April 2020. It was followed by five consecutive workshops that concluded in July 2020. Each workshop

consisted of two consecutive sessions (each lasting three hours), spread one week apart. The whole project lasted for 12 weeks. Of the 175 people who applied to attend the project group 75 people completed the full 12-week group, including the pilot group (those who did not meet the application criteria were not included in the project).

The project was evaluated and monitored using the CIPP Model. The tools that were used were the Zoom personal information form, the digital tool Mentimeter, Maxqda 2020 and SPSS 21. The Zoom personal information form was used to ensure intergroup homogeneity and intragroup variety in professional background. The Mentimeter provided instant and anonymous feedback to participants, established data and served to monitor group activities. The Maxqda and SPSS programs were used to do qualitative and quantitative analyses. Participants were asked to complete and submit Informed Consent forms.

The majority of the participants were from two major cities in Turkey, Ankara and Izmir, with additional attendees from more than 13 other cities in Turkey; most were psychologists while more than half the total participants reported having no previous experience with psychodrama. Most stated being motivated to attend in order to experience online psychodrama, 88.5% of participants reported benefiting from the project, 88.5% thought the content was well-organized, and 90.4% of participants were satisfied with the harmony of the group leaders.

The use of metaphors and cultural motifs were found to be efficient approaches for facilitating expression of emotions, self-awareness, and discovery of coping resources. Participants reported the project to be beneficial in discovering and experiencing online psychodrama, and also stated that they had found online tools and online psychodrama to be reliable. The reported benefits of the support project were decreased sense of isolation, improved mood, increased relaxation, activation of inner and outer resources, and heightened sense of hope and empowerment.

Some of the participants' recommendations were to add more sessions to the project, not mixing persons with different levels of psychodrama experience, adding more body actions and games and more self-compassion activities; asking that the project be repeated was another recommendation. The project was orally presented twice to the international group therapy community. The first presentation included the preliminary findings and took place on November 2020 at the International Online Research Symposium of the International Association

of Group Psychotherapies and Group Processes (IAGP). The second presentation followed the termination phase of the project and was performed on March 2021 at the Online Research Committee Symposium of the Federation of Psychodrama Training Organizations (FEPTO). The owners of the oral papers, in addition to Tele'Drama, were the implementers of the project, and all were Turkish psychodrama trainers working at Dr. Abdülkadir Özbek's Psychodrama Institute.

## CONCLUSION

With this article, the authors introduce the development and specifics of the Tele'Drama method and some of the projects of the Tele'Drama International during Covid-19. The main purpose of the method is to expand international sociometry, training in practical applications of action and expressive methods, group counseling and other interventions through online video conferencing applications.

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