

INTEGRATION OF DRAMA IN COUNSELLING YOUNG PEOPLE AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

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Abstract

This paper explores the effective integration of drama in counselling young people which is geared towards eliminating the prevailing moral decadence and redeemable degrees of psychological and mental distresses in contemporary times. It unveils the possible impact of the application of drama and professional counselling processes to nurture and inculcate good moral ethics and behavioural patterns in young people. The consistent efforts geared towards curbing the spread of moral decadence among the teeming young people in contemporary times across the globe has necessitated the need for the application of drama as a potent tool in complement of professional counselling to educate, inform and conscientise the mindset of these young people against vices and immoral behavioural patterns. The paper therefore recommends enhancement of the complementing application of drama as a therapeutic tool by counsellors and counselling coaches to empathetically aid quick results in counselling processes.

Keywords: Integration, Drama, Counselling, Young People, Tool, Contemporary Times

Introduction

The increasing spade of moral decadence especially amongst young people in contemporary times, is no doubt a scourge that is ravaging the society globally. These moral decadence ranging from sexual perversion to drug addiction, rebellion, profanity, and get-rich-quick syndrome that results in stealing, robbery and callous killing among other various forms of vices are as a result of poor or

lack of good parental upbringing and a failed society. Counsellors in the secular and religious folds are trying their best to employ various forms of counselling approaches and techniques in a bid to curb the ravaging situation in the contemporary society. Besides prayers, admonishment and chastisement, the complement of the creative arts, such as the performing arts including drama, dance, music, and rhetorical art are potent tools by which counselling can be made creatively effective to inform, educate, and conscientise the mind-set of young people towards nurturing good character which is moulded against moral decadence. Thus, the complementing application of applied drama therapy and counselling tends to be two sides of a coin that could work parallel to proffer lasting solution and transform the mindset of a depressed person.

Though the situation of moral decadence is overwhelming in most societies, adolescent counselling coaches, motivational speakers and applied/ therapeutic dramatists, children theatre practitioners among others have continued to employ their creative tools to impart and impact the young people towards curbing the various vices ravaging the society. It has become absolutely necessary in the contemporary days that counsellors should take advantage of the use of drama to effectively meet the psychological and emotional needs of their clients since arts and aesthetics appeal greatly to the young people. Integrating drama into counselling is gaining considerable traction in contemporary therapeutic practices. Drama provides a creative and expressive medium that can help young people articulate emotions, explore identity, and develop coping skills. Ginny Graham corroborates that “Drama work with young people is one of the most exciting and challenging creative activities which a teacher or group leader can experience. A well-motivated group working in harmony on a common purpose, provides opportunities for its members’ self development and enchantment of their artistic and social awareness”.¹ In essence, a depressed young mind would find solace and mind healing in an exciting form of counselling that employ drama. Graham further postulates that:

Young people are, in general extremists. They see things in absolute terms, right or wrong, black or white, fair or unfair. This is also how they tend to express their ideas, and they can be right. But sensitive drama work can enable them to explore such issues across continuum between extremes, to develop an empathic awareness of viewpoints of others. Thus their own ideas can become better informed and balanced.²

Connectivity of the Art of Drama and Counselling

There's a common goal between counselling and drama therapy; both serve as a drive for awareness, growth, healing and transformation. Drama and counselling, aids in the development of human and societal development. The connectivity of drama and counselling runs in a parallel relationship that tends to be concerned

with the sanity of the society. Drama as a mirror of the society and portrayal of human experiences is an integral part of human society that functions to proffer lasting solution by educating, informing and transforming the mind through the employment of entertaining and appealing message and lessons conveying drama or theatrical performance. Marshall Cassady and Pat Cassady enthuse that:

Drama remains an integral part of our lives, drama offers us escape. It enriches our lives. It teaches us about ourselves and others. It records our heritage, by reading or seeing plays produced, we better understand the attitudes, beliefs and feelings of people in different times throughout history, drama is a reflection of society, if it were not, it would have no appeal.³

Drama as a mirror of the society and portrayal of human experiences is usually devised with the employment of the various forms of the performing arts including acting, dancing and singing to reflect reality and accomplish empathy that would in turn touch emotions phenomenally. The art of acting, singing and dancing are integral part of human expressive nature that can be employed to convey serious issues of life in sound and movement that people can relate with easily. Edwin Wilson in the same line of thought explains that “Beyond their entertainment value, singing and dancing possess an unmatched ability to capture the beauty of sound and movement and to communicate a wide range of emotions”.⁴ The actor in the process of employing the creative tool of drama to achieve empathy that would effectively relate with realities of life can employ the various expressive art forms composed of acting, singing and dancing to convey life transforming messages that could inwardly effect healing.

The actor whom Coggin Philip sees as an indispensable interpreter in a play performance plays a central role in the process of dramatizing to portray human experiences.⁵ It is evident that actors serve as the live- wire that propels and sustains dramatic actions to represent or replicate a make believe of reality either on a live theatre stage or electronic media such as the television and radio. Therefore, the actor plays the role of injecting life into a piece of storyline that depicts or portrays certain human experiences. The actor who plays other people’s character must be creatively versatile to be able to internalize and accurately interpret the role they are playing to climax the height of empathy that will affect audience’s emotions. Beyond the entertaining function of the actor, he or she tends to wear a coat of many colours that encompasses the place of a counsellor, psychologist, sociologist, therapist, educator, motivator among others in the process of replicating human experiences, in a bid to unveil certain lessons conveyed through drama. The actor’s creative tools with which he or she conveys messages include the body, the voice and the mind.

The Actor's Body, Voice and Mind

The actor's body is the physical vessel that the actor communicates with in series of representational gestures and postures to expressively imitate the actions of another person. An actor's body is a world of its own. A world meant to be experimented on, explored, and understood. There is a lot an actor can do with his body as a tool. He can sharpen it, free it of disliked elements, and be in control of it. From facial expressions to gestures and mimetic actions, an actor is not afraid of using any and every part of his/ her body to nail his/ her art.

With the voice, the actor utters his/ her lines and dialogues with other actors in inflective tonal patterns, movements and dramatic display. With the voice, the actor establishes his/ her mood and feelings at every point of his or her composite actions. The voice itself is a carrier of emotions; anger, fear, love, joy, indifference, etc., and there are many emotions the voice can convey. An actor should tell a story with his/ her voice as much as he describes it with his body. The body and the voice must be in harmony and should always be in sync except for intentional cases of irony or sarcasm.

The mind is the working machine of the actor that connects his or her mentality, psychology and the physicality of the internalized role playing. Good use of intellect and imagination is very crucial for every actor's technique and growth. An actor must have an imaginative mind, and he/ she must be thoughtful as well as creative. The mind of an actor must be sharp, and his/ her ability to pick up details from everyday life and use them as applicable must be sharpened.

Actors must be empathetically involved in the emotional world of their characters while simultaneously meeting the technical needs of articulation and projection. Following the director's blocking, adjusting to the audience's laughter and reactions, working with props, and the ability to deal with unforeseen circumstances while acting are all technical skills that an actor must have. A good balance of these is what separates professional actors from amateurs. Therefore, the actor's body, voice, and mind all work together in a collaborative effort to appropriately internalize and interpret his or her character role playing without much difficulty.

Counselling Approaches and The Application of Drama

Like drama, counselling is a human mind targeted advisory, admonishing, motivational, inspiring and therapeutic engagement that requires subtle and attention capturing approaches and techniques. Counsellors usually employ humane nuances in a bid to influence the emotion and psychology of a person in need for a positive transformation. Johnson Oladele alludes that "counselling approaches, modes and methods are labeled differently by different scholars, though the different terminologies are interchangeably used based on choice of

words. All these approaches are systemic ways of serving the counselling process”.⁶ He further pontificates that;

Theoretical models for counseling have their origins in the values and belief of individuals who, in turn, have converted these into a philosophy and theoretical model for counseling. These values and beliefs form a rationale for what one does, how one does it, and under what circumstances. Every counselor should evolve his or her own unique counseling style, but in this process he or she is guided by his or her knowledge and understanding of the acceptable and well researched models available to his or her professional field.⁷

The above submission confirms that counselling is a process that is open to creativity and eclectics though, it is however by tested foundational approaches or theories. Thus, some of the notable approaches usually employed to guide other emerging innovations include the likes of Carl Rogers’s person-centred approach, Sigmund Freud’s psychodynamic approach, and Ellis and Beck’s Cognitive behavioural therapy among others.

Counselling offers advice and guidance out of anxiety, depression and diverse forms of social malady. In the same vein, Oladele states that counselling has been used to denote a wide range of procedures including advice-giving, support in times of trouble or need, encouragement, information giving, and test interpretation. He submits further that “the procedures employed encompass a wide variety of techniques drawn from knowledge of learning process. Counselling thus becomes a re-education or re-learning or counter-learning”.⁸ that is, counselling is a means targeted at providing guidance out of a situation. Michael Aziude and Charles Iwundu corroborates by explaining that “counselling deals with normal human beings, that is, individuals who have minor psychological problems, such as inability to take decisions on their own, or to handle dreadful or awful situations of life”.⁹ In essence, counsellors engage in counselling activity to assist the counselee to make interpretation of facts relating to a choice, plan or adjustment.

Effective counselling processes can be hinged and sailed on three different approaches or techniques which include; Directive counselling; a counselling approach in which the counsellor takes the lead and dictate the pace and direction of the discussion and process. He or she directs specific questions to the counselee in order to draw facts surrounding the counselee’s issue. Non-directive counselling is a counselee centred therapy. In other words, it is an approach where the counsellor is not directly providing the counselee the required solutions to their problems. That is, the counselee in this case is engaged to explore himself and lead the discussion. The eclectic counselling is an approach that combines several creative techniques to appropriately meet the

demands of the different kinds of issues. Irrespective of whichever type of approach and technique that a counselling chooses to employ, the purpose of counselling is objectively established to guide and proffer solutions to diverse issues of life. Iwundu explains that the reason counselling is imperative is because “Man also undergoes some sort of wilderness experience, betrayal, humiliation and doubt. All humans pass through tragic triad of human existence; pains (suffering), guilt and death”.¹⁰ Thus, counselling is usually employed for guidance and to proffer solutions to diverse problems that cuts across every spheres of human life and living in the society. Hence, the reason for the different categories of counselling which includes; marriage and family counselling, career counselling, rehabilitation counselling, mental health counselling, substance abuse counselling, and educational counselling.

Just as the actor is endowed with creative skills with which he or she portrays another person’s character to convincingly make believe, an effective counsellor is a professional, equipped with compassionate and good human relation to be able to proffer solution to the clients in need. A good counsellor should be endowed with attributes and skills that encompass patience, calm, active listening; ability to give listening ear to the client, empathy; understanding and sharing the feelings of another person, unconditional positive regard and genuiness of purpose. The counsellor can only be able to create a good and result yielding counselling session with a client by painstakingly sailing with the foundational counselling ingredients and processes involving:

- (i) Establishment of good rapports to build trust between the counsellor and client,
- (ii) Identifying client's concerns, goals and motivations,
- (iii) Collaborating with the client to establish specific and achievable goals,
- (iv) Examining the client's behavioural patterns, thoughts and feelings, digging deep through structured questionings and keen observations to gain insight,
- (v) Employment of humane strategies and techniques to effect positive changes,
- (vi) Evaluating the client by assessing progress made so far and adjusts approaches where needed.

The faces and benefits of Drama in Counselling

Donald Blocher, in line with the essence of counselling, defines that “counselling is helping an individual become aware of himself and the ways in which he is reacting to the behavioural influences of his environment”.¹¹ Also, Leona Tyler affirms that “the purpose of counselling is to facilitate wise choices and certain kinds of decisions on which a person’s later development depends”.¹² It is in the same vein that drama can be applied to provide a safe and comfortable outlet for

expressing and processing emotions. Application of drama comes in diverse forms depending markedly on the nature of problem or issue being addressed. Thus, the different faces of drama application in counselling include:

1. Role-Playing: This is an enactment of scenarios relating to the issues being addressed are acted out to demonstrate the usage of social skills, building confidence and navigating through challenging situations.
2. Drama Therapy: This is the use of drama and theatre techniques to facilitate personal growth and healing emotionally, and psychologically for a total wellbeing.
3. Pantomimic/ Eclectic Movement: This is a spontaneous use of creativity to demonstrate ordinate use of emotional expressions and how to access it.
4. Storytelling is creatively used to share personal experiences, gain insight and develop empathy. Narrative drama therapy helps to externalize problems and facilitate reconstruction.
5. Puppetry can also be used to demonstrate emotions, experiences and relationships. Puppetry is an appendage of play therapy hybrid whereby drama is fused with fantasies and visual aesthetic appeal.

The complementing application of drama in counselling aids the achievement of; empathy and understanding. This is usually propelled with the art of role-playing and storytelling to clearly unveil certain behavioural patterns, express emotions and as well foster empathy and compassion. In essence, role playing which in other words is portraying the character and experience of another person through dramatic enactment/ acting can: enhance self-esteem and help build confidence, help to develop essential social skills that could be of great worth to counsellee. Thus, the application of drama in counselling encourages creative thinking, restructured thought patterns and helps develop problem-solving skills.

In light of the above, it has been vividly portrayed that young people including children, adolescents, adults or persons with the issues of anxiety, depression and general mental health concerns, individuals with disabilities and the likes can benefit from this. When drama is integrated into counselling processes, counsellors and drama therapists are able to create unique, eclectic and engaging approaches that enhance personal growth, healing, and self-awareness. Drama is now used in a range of contemporary applications in counselling settings including schools, juvenile detention centres, and hospitals among others. In school-based counselling for instance, role-plays are applied to address bullying, peer pressure, anxiety, trauma and grief. Also, trauma-informed recovery therapy usually employs drama to aid survivors' process traumatic experiences through enactment. A group-based counselling that employs the use of drama helps enormously to build self esteem, foster social interaction and collective problem-solving drive and experiences. Therefore, a template of an applied drama/ psychotherapeutic play is here devised to address prevailing emotional, mental

and psychological issues especially amongst young people in the society. The devised drama therapy template titled *IN SEARCH OF ME* is a one-act psychotherapeutic dramatic piece that unfolds in three sequels. The storyline portrays the struggles of a depressed person and pathway unto attaining a total mind healing and transformation. The dramatic piece design is a fusion of linear and flashback plot structure rooted in the artistic philosophy of surrealism which emphasis the liberation of the mind through the imaginative power of the subconscious. The play; *In Search of Me*, represents those moments of emotional and psychological depression or mental imbalances that results in the loss of one's mind and identity. The psychotherapeutic drama piece is geared towards the attainment of mental and psychological healing, and total wellbeing. Beside its entertainment value that provides pleasure and succour, the one-act play through the lessons it conveys open up the mind to possible pathways to resolution.

IN SEARCH OF ME; Psychotherapeutic Drama Template

Distress

Flashes of spotlights gradually illuminate Yandeboh, a middle aged lady squeezing up herself inside a single sofa sobbing. The subtle sob gradually transforms into a loud groaning that unveils her state of confusion, anxiety and depression. She rises from the sofa and takes a few steps forward and pauses. She stares into the space in quick succession, and intermittently gazes right, left and pauses again. She cries aloud and suddenly begins to search for something to pick up as she dashes towards her kitchenette, picks up a knife and advances towards the centre stage. She sobs as she attempts to pierce the knife through her stomach but her urge to commit suicide fails her. She drops the knife and searches out for her container of hard drugs. She pours out a good number of tablets from inside the container to consume but again, her urge to do it fails. She throws the drugs away and cringes, crying aloud as she gradually freezes, giving way to an evolving flashback scenario at the left stage.

Memory Lane

At left stage, a man is seen dancing in the company of numerous women of low virtues, while he drinks himself into stupor. His numerous companies toss him here and there as he intermittently staggers and falls to make his way home. The man gets to his abode and engages in a scuffle with his wife. The daughter; Yandeboh comes in-between the scuffle but the two kicks her away and split into different directions leaving her all to herself.

Yandeboh: (Sobs). Papa has been drinking and beating my mama and no one cares for me, ohhhhhh

Orchestra: Ohhhhhh, Your papa has been drinking, beating your mama and no one cares for you, ohhhhhh-someone please rescue her, ohhhhhh-someone please rescue her.

Yandebob: Ohhhhhh, someone please rescue me, Ohhhhhh, someone, please rescue me

While still sobbing, a group of scallywags surfaces to lure her into their midst. Yandebob soon feels at home with the scallywags who lead her step after step into trying out different kinds of vices that eventually throws her into a state of emotional imbalances. Yandebob defreeze as the flashback enactment dwindles. She gropes around in quick succession and stops abruptly toning out in a loud voice;

.Last-Ditch

Yandebob: My papa was an unrepentant drunk who turned my mama into a punching bag. My papa and my mama separated and went different ways. I was left alone to fend for myself without care and protection. I found no one that is kind enough to turn to, and no where safe to hide. Little Yandebob became an easy prey to bullying, molestation and all sorts of abuse. I was abused, used, tossed all around, and I would always cry that; I have been deceived once again.

Orchestra: Abused, used, tossed here and there, you've been deceived once again. Yandebob: Those wolves who led me in their dark pathways soon left me alone, battered and dented. I developed tough skin myself so I could survive through the dark pathways but now I'm useless and I have lost myself. I'm in search of me, and I need someone to rescue me.

Darktone: Yandebob, Yandebob, Yandebobhhhhhhhhhh. The echo sets Yandebob into confusion

Orchestra: Yandebob, Yandebob, Yandebobhhhhhhhhhh. Yandebob looks around but no one in sight

Darktone: Aren't you forgetting that you have an unfinished business? Make haste to put an end to this trauma you are experiencing. After all, you are useless to yourself and of no use to anyone.

Yandebob groans in a loud voice as she moves in a zigzag and vicious circle searching out for something to pick up once again.

Darktone: There, there, there. The voice draws Yandebob's attention to a nearby deep well.

Yandebob: Yes, lets put an end to this trauma at once. She tip toes towards the well

Darktone: No, not in that manner, make it faster, make it faster, and make it faster

Lifetone: No, no, no, no don't do it Yandebob.

You are born to win, you are destined to prosper, born to reign, destined to shine

Orchestra: No, no,no, no don't do it Yandebob

Lifetone: Weeping may last only for a night, but joy comes in the morning, ohhhhhh

Orchestra: It will be all over in the morning, nooo don't do it Yandebob

Yandebob is caught in-between the voices of Darktone and Lifetone, she shouts and heads towards the well and attempts to jump inside. Meanwhile, a dude at the opposite side that has been all along trying to knot a rope to hang himself in desperation abruptly stops and rushes towards Yandebob's direction and pushes her away from attempting to jump into the deep well. Both of them sit back to back panting and thinking of what next move to take. After few moments of stillness, Yandebob and the dude both attempt in opposite directions to resume their suicide mission but withdraw at the sound of Lifetone's caution.

Lifetone: No, don't do it. If you must cry, cry!

For tears is naturally part of the rhythms of life's sweet and bitter experiences.

But remember that it is equally not unnatural to wipe your tears;

Brace up and stand up to mystery life against all odds;

Arise, stand bold with squared shoulder to strive and embrace your brighter days of laughter.

Yandebob: (She rises with a renewed motivation and excitement) Yes, I am Yandebob, I am beautiful and strong. No, not even the scars of my past can deter me from advancing. Why so downcast my soul, put your hope in God and move with confidence.

Orchestra: yeah, you are Yandebob, the beautiful, You are spectacular, you've got the ability to colour and rule your world.

Yandebob: Yes, I am Yandebob and I am suave. I am born to win, destined to prosper, born to shine, I am born to reign. Yeah, I am Yandebob and am spectacular, I rule and colour my world. Yeah, I found me. Yandebob is free at last.

Yandebob in company of the dude on the same path with her swing into successive representational dance movements that portrays freedom and joy as light fades.

The above psychotherapeutic drama template is devised to fit into eclectic counselling approach as it addresses emotional, psychological and mental trauma resulting from root factors such as abuse, neglect, inordinate substance use and amorous life style. The drama is an experimental piece composed to accommodate a fusion of dramatic gestures/actions, dance movements, music, and rhetorical art. The dramatic piece can also be achieved as a one man actor monodrama (monologue) in which the use of symbolic sound effects, pantomimic dance movements and music would be maximally employed to complement the one man acting. Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis in their analysis of the usefulness of drama affirm that "Models of drama, theatre and performance have also been deployed at different junctures by other disciplines, notably the social sciences. Dramatic shapes, especially around crisis and resolution, have provided models for the ways in which societies behave, or perform".¹³ Drama, in essence

functions to transform the society radically by conveying moral lessons that are geared toward the positive transformation of the society.

While it is naturally expected that a counsellor deploying the tool of applied and therapeutic drama by employing the services of professional actors, the counsellee or client can also be engaged to be a part of such a therapeutic drama to create empathy that would propel the expected healing process. The dramatic piece can be effectively employed to conform to any given type or category of counselling process. Beyond live theatre stage performance, the dramatic piece can also be adapted to various medium such as the television and radio. Also, the constantly expanding realm of social media provides avenue through which applied drama of this sort can be made readily available in different styles and forms for counsellor's accessibility to complement their traditional mode of counselling.

Conclusion

As part of a creative approach in counselling processes, integration of drama as an expressive art form that appeals to young people would no doubt be an effective tool in the development, modification and transformation of the behavioural patterns of the young people. Therefore, drama is a proven tool for the empathic influence of emotion, and as such can be effectively integrated into counselling geared towards providing lasting solutions to mental, emotional and psychological issues resulting from anxiety, depression, amorous behavioural patterns, social malady and inordinate use of harmful substances. The paper, therefore, recommends enhancement of eclectic counselling approach that would incorporate drama for effective result. A high level of collaboration between professional counsellors and dramatists; drama therapists, children/ educational theatre specialists, dance kinesiologists and theatre practitioners in general should be encouraged to engage a dynamic, robust, and effective therapeutic counselling processes that would address diverse issues of human needs. The paper also recommends that it is necessary that Departments of Guidance and Counselling in the Universities and other institutions of higher learning should introduce drama courses, especially applied drama therapy and children/ educational theatre into the curriculum to better equip counsellors in training with the necessary creative and dramatic skills that would be of immense benefit to counselling field and processes.

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