

THE FOUNDATION OF A COLLABORATION

BLENDING PSYCHOTHERAPY AND PSYCHODRAMA FOR TRAUMA SURVIVORS

Linda Ciotola, is an internationally recognized psychodramatist and has co-authored with Karen Carnabucci, *Beyond the Silence & the Fury: Action Methods with Eating Disorders*. She has a Master's Degree in Education, is a Board Certified Trainer-Educator-Practitioner of Psychodrama, Group Psychotherapy and Sociometry and a Therapeutic Spiral Model™ Certified Trainer, a certified health coach, yoga instructor, a Reiki Master Teacher and Interfaith Minister. Linda is married to her loving husband of 50 years, has two children, three grand-children and a wonderful collie named Lassie.

Nancy Alexander has a Master's Degree in Social Work, is a Mental Health Educator and a psychotherapist specializing in trauma disorders. She has her TAE (Trained Auxiliary Ego) in the Therapeutic Spiral Model™, in addition to hundreds of hours of Psychodrama training. Nancy has authored and published three novels, six short stories and has narrated seven audiobooks. Nancy has two children, four grandchildren and a Himalayan mix named Tahji.

Naturally enough, Nancy and Linda met in a clinical setting. The year was 2002. Linda was busy with her lifestyle-counseling practice and training in psychodrama. Nancy was busy with her solo psychotherapy practice specializing in reconstructive therapy with trauma survivors. At the time, Linda was engaged in psychodrama training and it wasn't long before Nancy was eager to have her clients benefit from the healing power of psychodrama. She began referring her clients to Kate Hudgins' weekend programs *Psychodrama for Trauma Survivors*. Seeing the benefits, Nancy was eager to learn more about the Therapeutic Spiral Model™ co-created by Kate Hudgins and Francesca Toscani specifically for those with trauma history. Their shared professional connection with an eating disordered client and her family brought them to a family therapy session one night. During that session, virtually strangers to one another, their synchronicity was instantly apparent. As if they'd worked together for years, they found their perceptions, reactions and interventions converged seamlessly. TELE!

Linda and Nancy developed a working alliance and actively explored ways to incorporate psychodrama into Nancy's psychotherapy practice. Working with individuals diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Dissociative Identity Disorder, they sought to create innovative, integrative and collaborative approaches that would be beneficial to this troubled population. Since emotional wounds are stored in cognitively inaccessible parts of the brain they are best addressed through action methods like psychodrama, rather than primarily cognitive, verbal modalities. They understood the answer was in experiential therapies.

They began by scheduling intermittent day-long private psychodramas. With Linda as the director, a team of psychodrama trainees including Connie Newton and Lisa Miller, was established. Team members served as auxiliaries during these day-long sessions. The team met and worked with each individual protagonist, for a day-long private, individual psychodrama session. Following each day-long psychodrama the protagonist would be assigned a "project of integration" which included words and images of meaning making to anchor in the neurobiological changes. Linda would also join Nancy for a joint session with each protagonist to assist in the integrative process. This cohesive, highly attuned

team was present for all of the protagonists over a period of 10 years, providing object constancy and invaluable historical perspective.

During this period of time, in addition to the day-long, individual psychodrama sessions, Nancy and Linda developed three distinct treatment models to be used with both individuals and groups. Each method integrated psychodrama with established psychotherapeutic constructs, tailored to each specific protagonist. Concurrently, Lisa, Connie and Nancy all pursued extensive psychodrama training and Linda received her TEP.

Highlights of their integrative approach can be found in their article entitled *Teamwork and Trauma Recovery*, published in the Spring 2014 issue of The Journal of Psychodrama, Sociometry and Group Psychotherapy.

One of these models, *The Collaborative Approach*, involved having both Nancy and Linda in the room with one client at the same time. Those co-led sessions occurred weekly with individual clients, who needed extra psychodramatic support and 'mini' dramas in order to function effectively. Along with those collaborative sessions, there were ongoing individual psychotherapy sessions and intermittent day-long psychodramas with the entire team.

In addition, along with another experienced psychodramatist, they designed a series of weekend workshops called the *Seasons Workshop Series*. Included were members of the psychodrama team, individuals in Nancy's practice and some referred by other therapists. The *Seasons Workshop* took place over a 16 month period of time. Themes were based upon the 5 elements of Chinese Medicine.

These ongoing mixed-modality approaches were used collectively, sequentially or intermittently to advance the recovery process for the individuals in treatment, while providing safe and consistent containment and allowing for developmental repair.

During this period of time, they also created and delivered three professional presentations:

- The Intersecting Methods Model: Giving Voice to the Unspoken, NASW-MD Annual Conference. 2/21/2010
- Narcissism: A Counter-Transference Challenge – NASW-MD Chapter, 10/17/2010
- Psychodrama: The Gift of Transformation. 8/29/2016

One other, rather unusual, collaborative endeavor occurred when Nancy was elected to Chair a Village Board in Columbia. Faced with an array of County Legislative dilemmas and a cadre of combative, polarized board members, she asked Linda for help. Together they devised and led a day-long team building exercise using Sociometric methods to iron out differences.

In 2015, when Nancy retired from private practice, another form of collaboration took root. Both felt compelled to pass their knowledge, experience and passion for these modalities to another generation of psychodramatists who could carry on the work.

They loved the work they had done, were thrilled and encouraged by the success their clients had had with these treatment experiences and believe their critical information about trauma recovery should not just disappear. They recognized a desperate need for more effective recovery methods throughout

the world and were committed to spreading the word - as well as knowledge and belief in psychodrama to the next generation.

ACTS (Alexander and Ciotola Training Service) was launched in 2016 with the stated goal of educating practitioners about how psychodrama can be used effectively along with psychotherapy, to enhance the trauma healing process. As 'distance learning' had become the cutting edge technology in education, they moved in that direction relying on tech guru and business manager par excellence, Tiffany Carter, who made everything somehow seamlessly appear online. Introduction to Psychodrama with Trauma Survivors, an educational program with CEU approval was launched.

The goal was to introduce potential psychodramatists to the power of psychodrama, especially the Therapeutic Spiral Method™. Working, planning, writing, rehearsing and recording live psychodramas took nearly two years. They collected an excellent psychodrama team including long time team member Connie Newton, TSM TAE and protagonist/team member Will Halm, TSM TAE. (TAE = Trained Auxiliary Ego)

With Linda in the Director Role and Nancy in the Producer Role, Introduction to Psychodrama with Trauma Survivors, a 13 hour, fully transportable, on-demand training program, was created.

They hoped the vibrant imagery and detail would provide a window into the exciting world of psychodrama and encourage viewers to obtain the necessary training and supervision to become qualified functioning psychodramatists.

Linda and Nancy see their dedication to psychodrama has traveled many roads, from clinical collaboration to developing a full range of psychodramatic opportunities, to teaching and training in the professional community, to writing an article and finally to developing a fully functioning online training program.

Through the years, their shared journey went through periods of change, growth and awareness. With the wisdom of hindsight, they see that many of Moreno's basic principles, such as role theory, sharing and processing have guided their collaboration just as they in turn guided the transformational psychodramatic work with others.

The shared desire to help others recover from trauma and the unique synergy that sparks their spontaneity, has unlocked boundless creative opportunities for healing those in need.

Nancy and Linda are grateful to their clients/protagonists for their trust and participation, their responsiveness and sharing.

Here is what Linda and Nancy say in their own words:

The core of our collaboration is our relationship. There is a deep trust that flows between us, rooted in mutual respect, flexibility and a unique synergy that sparks our spontaneity and has unlocked infinite opportunities for healing those in need. From the outset, we were bound by a mutual mission. We wanted to help individuals with a history of trauma and we wanted to use psychodrama to help them.

We both shared strong empathic connection to this troubled, crisis-ridden population; that along with our mutual trust and commitment to help, outweighed whatever differences our academic, employment or personal histories might have presented.

This didn't mean we discounted our individual views or chose one point of view over the other, on the contrary, we counted on our 'spark of spontaneity' to help us build and develop something altogether unique; something we co-created.

Our different points of view, knowledge base and skill sets enriched our work, allowing us to accurately label and clarify our differences, thus forming a broader multi-variant set of theoretical constructs. We value our training and our work together. We learn new things from one another with each passing experience.

And always, the backdrop of our collaboration remained this extremely traumatized population with their unique strengths which necessitated not only innovative approaches but required us to be united and mutually supportive or willing to be transparent on those rare moments when unification was not possible.

We Are Grateful:

We feel blessed that we have been able to do this work for all of these years, to co-create so many meaningful, healing, therapeutic experiences and finally to co-create this first of its kind online psychodramatic educational program called Introduction to Psychodrama.

We want to thank Kate Hudgins for co-creating The Therapeutic Spiral Methodtm and for allowing us to learn from her in all the ways and many times we did.

We want to thank all of our teachers and trainers for their patience and wisdom: especially JoAnn Thacker, Joe Kenna, Mario Cossa and Kate Hudgins.

We want to thank our wonderful, loving team members Lisa Miller, Constance Newton and Will Halm for their skill, dedication and willingness to share from their hearts.

We want to thank Tiffany Carter, our tech guru and business manager extraordinaire for her everything.

We thank colleagues Cathy Nugent and Kathy Amsden for their unwavering encouragement and support.

We want to thank Zerka Moreno posthumously and we dedicate our Introduction to Psychodrama with Trauma Survivors online educational program to her.

Dedication to Zerka Moreno

Zerka Moreno was an inspiration. She was an agent of change. She was powerful and empowering; she was brilliant and encouraged creativity in others.

Zerka collaborated with her husband, JL Moreno, and expanded his foundational work and legacy for decades following his death. She understood the human experience from a unique, empathic perspective, which allowed her to double and role-reverse with every human being.

A pioneer among women, Zerka, had an unshakable conviction that people could change and learn *to dream again*. She believed that the 'autonomous

healing center' exists in every human being and is the touchstone of personal and universal healing.

It is that belief which motivated her through many life challenges to tirelessly and ceaselessly continue her dedication to psychodrama, even when bed-ridden.

It is to this incomparable woman that our online training program is dedicated.

We want to thank ASGPP for honoring us with the 2019 Collaborator's Award

We are grateful to all who have shared this journey in whatever way they did and are grateful for the opportunities their collaboration has provided for their own personal growth, professional expansion and existential awareness.

And we are deeply grateful to one another and for The Divine Grace that brought us together and supported all of our work.