

Studying an MA in dramatherapy: an island of sanity in Israel's turbulent times

Dovrat Harel, Amani Musah, Galila Oren & Susana Pendzik

The Dramatherapy Graduate Programme at Tel-Hai College (Israel) enrolls around 20-25 students per year, of whom approximately 10-20% belong to the Arab-Palestinian population living in Israel (including Bedouin, Christian, Druze, and Muslim). Often the learning process takes place against the background of security and political events, at the centre of which is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although the students do not enrol in the program to deal with the conflict, the complexity of the situation challenges the learning process, and could easily lead to mutual hostility, stigmatization, and mistrust.

Over the years, we have observed in the programme a sort of “island of sanity” taking place – even in the darkest times, such as the recent political developments in Israel and worldwide. We thought that this remarkable occurrence could be partly influenced by dramatherapy-based pedagogy, which encourages intercultural understanding and trust-building relationships between the parties. Dramatherapy processes have been known to foster dialogue in conflict situations (Volkas, 2014), develop cultural sensitivity and awareness to stigmas and implicit biases (Williams, 2016), and have been thoroughly used in connection with social justice issues (Sajnani, 2016; George Trottier & Williams, 2019; Snow, 2022).

This research takes a closer look at the pedagogy of dramatherapy in relation to its potential for promoting openness and creating trust-building relationships. Strongly based on experiential learning, dramatherapy pedagogical methods combine a sensitive application of verbal and non-verbal means, body-work, voice, movement, and improvisation, coupled with active listening and empathy-generating tools. Furthermore, dramatherapy training methods encourage the expression of personal feelings and opinions in a full and authentic way (Bird & Tozer, 2016), while also allowing for the use of aesthetic distance (Landy, 1996).

This paper will present preliminary findings of a qualitative, arts-based research study that focusses on the experiences of Palestinian and Jewish dramatherapy students of each other throughout the duration of their master's programme studies.

References

Bird, D. & Tozer, K. (2016). Towards a drama therapy pedagogy: An a/r/tographic study using dramatic improvisation. *Drama Therapy Review*, 2(2), 273-284.

Landy, R.J. (1996). Drama therapy and distancing: Reflections on theory and clinical application. *Arts in Psychotherapy*, 23(5), 367-73.

Sajjani, N. (2016). A critical aesthetic paradigm in drama therapy: Aesthetic distance, action and meaning making in the service of diversity and social justice. In S. Jennings and C. Holmwood (eds.), *Routledge international handbook of dramatherapy* (pp. 145-159). Routledge.

Snow, S. (2022). *Ethnodramatherapy: Integrating research, therapy, theatre and social activism into one method*. Routledge.

Volkas, A. (2014). Drama therapy in the repair of collective trauma. In N. Sajjani & D.R. Johnson (eds.), *Trauma informed drama therapy: Transforming clinics, classrooms, and communities* (pp. 41-67). Charles C. Thomas.

Williams, B. (2016). Minding our own biases: Using drama therapeutic tools to identify and challenge assumptions, biases and stereotypes. *Drama Therapy Review*, 2(1), 9-23.

https://doi.org/10.1386/dtr.2.1.9_1

Biography

Susana Pendzik, PhD., RDT is Associate Professor and Former Head of the Drama Therapy Graduate Program at Tel Hai College (Israel), also lectures at the Theatre Department of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Swiss Dramatherapy Institute, the Dramatherapy Diploma at the University of Cuyo (Argentina) and in other institutions of higher education in Europe, Latin America, and the USA. Susana has developed the Six-Key Model – a method of intervention and assessment in drama therapy and the Dramatic Resonances Approach. A

published poetess, theatre director, and researcher, she is a prolific writer, authoring many articles and book chapters, co-editing books, such as *Assessment in drama therapy* (2012), and *The self in performance* (2016), as well as books: *Gruppenarbeit mit mißhandelten Frauen* (1999) [Spanish and German] and *Dramaterapia: Un enfoque creativo para el trabajo terapéutico* (2018). Susana is a supervisor and has a private practice.

Recent publications and conference presentations

Haba-Ashkenazi, H., Dahan, A., Pendzik, S. (2023). **The use of the BASIC Ph Model as an additional listening tool for Playback Theater performers and conductors: An exploratory study.** *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 83, 102019. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2023.102019>

Mashiah, H. and Pendzik, S. (2023). **Revisiting the experience of art therapists and drama therapists working in schools two years after the first lockdown: A qualitative pilot.** *OBM Integrative and Complementary Medicine, Special issue: Expressive Arts Therapies during and in the Aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic* 8(3) 027 <https://www.lidsen.com/journals/icm/icm-08-03-027>

Medina, M. and Pendzik, S. (2023). **Therapeutic aspects in the autobiographical / autoethnographic performance of three women addressing their experience of communal sleeping as children in the Kibbutz.** *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance.* <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2023.2220652>

Pendzik, S., Guerrero, S., Alvarez, R., Garcia, I., Jorzyk, E., Méndez, K., Contreras, P., Ortiz, P., Sánchez Astrada, F., Scheibler, E., Toci, M. (2023). **The first international drama therapy practicum intensive in Mendoza, Argentina.** *The Drama Therapy Review.* In press.

Pendzik, S., Lutz, I., and Heppekausen, J. (estimated 2023). **De/constructing the past, constructing the future: A theatre-based project on the perception of the holocaust by German youngsters.** In N. Sajjani and D. Johnson (eds.), *Trauma-informed drama therapy.* 2nd edition, Springfield, Il: Charles. C. Thomas. In press.