

# Moreno's Methods in Academia (or the lack of): A Call to Action

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I was introduced to psychodrama as a teenager in the course of my own personal journey of healing. Having experienced its therapeutic power, I knew it was something that I wanted to learn and utilize throughout my career. I was surprised that psychodrama was never mentioned in my bachelor's psychology program, then disappointed that it was only briefly mentioned in my MSW program. By the time I started my doctorate in clinical social work, I had simply accepted the fact that psychodrama would not be taught in the program and that I could contribute to changing this for future generations.

My doctoral dissertation explored the decline of group work courses/concentrations in social work graduate programs, explored the presence (or lack) of Moreno's methods in academia internationally, and presented an MSW course curriculum integrating social work with groups with Moreno's methods. This dissertation project gave me a unique opportunity to work closely with expert social work educators exploring the strengths and limitations of teaching sociometry/psychodrama in a university setting as well as using psychodrama/sociometry as experiential teaching processes in academia. I was surprised to find there are only a handful of current courses in the USA that teach Moreno's methods in university degree programs. Most of these courses are embedded within drama therapy degrees while only a few are offered as electives in psychology, counseling, and social work departments. At the same time however, entire graduate degrees in psychodrama are offered countries such as Israel, Spain, and England. Zerka Moreno's 2012 statement in our PNN still rings true today: "there are Master's tracks in a number of universities abroad. Why not in our country?"

Although J.L. Moreno taught several courses in universities in the USA throughout his life (and was even nominated as head of Harvard University's Sociology Department in 1947), today students are considered lucky if they hear psychodrama mentioned briefly in their studies. How did we get here? A few decades ago, there were more psychodrama courses offered in American academia and even a psychology degree with a concentration in psychodrama at West Chester University. It seems that sociometry, psychodrama, and group psychotherapy have been significantly marginalized in universities since the 80s and 90s. In my judgement, there are complicated reasons for this decline including the politics of Evidence-Based Practice, a lack of psychodrama research and publications, the decline in group work education, individualism in American culture, the dominance of the medical model, and frankly, a lack of professionalism in psychodrama trainers/educators.

Of all of the professional conferences I've attended and of the 11 professional societies that I hold membership in, I experience ASGPP as the least professionalized. I've been to dozens of psychodrama "*training*" workshops where I couldn't tell if it was a therapy session or an educational event. I've heard other professionals say they have avoided psychodrama for years because of their experience of uncontained demonstrations or guest lectures. Furthermore, I've witnessed multiple trainers *follow their protagonists* into an uncontrolled trauma catharsis in a university/conference setting. I have never seen trainers or educators other than psychodramatists do this - while we could argue it is an important aspect of *post-graduate psychodrama training* - it is simply unfit for an academic context. A psychodrama training workshop is very different than a guest lecture, conference workshop, or university course. The levels of appropriate emotional experiencing and disclosure are different from setting to setting. At the same time, the ASGPP conference is my favorite conference of the year, the most engaging, and feels the most like home. I wonder how we might hold onto our warmth, spontaneity, creativity, and experiential teaching methods while professionalizing as a field and developing boundaries and containment in our teaching sessions. My sense is that this lack of professionalization holds us back from fully rooting within academia - which would lend itself to psychodrama courses/degrees, publications, research, and a constant flow of new students into our field.

In the past decade, group work has begun to slowly re-emerge in academic programs including in the fields of social work, psychology, and counseling. As universities continue to warm-up to group work, we have an opportunity to reintroduce sociometry and psychodrama as well. I urge us to take advantage of this opportunity to integrate psychodrama into universities. I call psychodrama trainers to reflect on translating psychodrama *training* into psychodrama *education* - and to actively engage with the American academic system.

As chair of the Professional Liaison Committee, I invite you to join in this initiative and contribute to this discussion. If you have experience teaching (or learning) sociometry/psychodrama in a university setting, please send your thoughts to me at [Scott@SGiacomucci.com](mailto:Scott@SGiacomucci.com) and/or consider helping to draft a document of recommended best practices for teaching Moreno's methods in academic settings.