

Adena Bank Lees called me a few days before a full-day workshop we were going to facilitate together and informed me that she just found out one of our attendees was blind. Neither of us had ever conducted a continuing education workshop, in action, with a blind participant before and we considered refunding his registration and explaining that the workshop was not going to meet his needs. Still high from having passed my CP exam in 2012 (it's a high that lasts a long time), I flippantly dismissed that idea, asserting that we, as the directors, the psychodrama trainers, needed to be the most spontaneous people in the room and that we were both so wonderfully talented it wouldn't be an issue, adding that even J.L. Moreno would only require we handle the situation adequately, being our first exposure to the novel situation of having a blind student, thus convincing my co-facilitator to welcome this learning opportunity and welcome him wholeheartedly to our workshop.

The workshop he had signed up to attend was a 7-hour continuing education workshop in which we were going to cover the topics of Cultural Competence & Diversity as well as Ethics, two areas in which every Arizona licensed mental health practitioner needs to get continuing education every renewal period. Therefore, we were not specifically going to be teaching psychodrama, but rather, teaching required information, just using action methods to convey the information in a deep and fun way. On the morning of the workshop, I began to panic about how we were going to convey the information he needed to acquire in order to meet licensure requirements since our handouts contained all the needed information in case our workshop missed anything and it suddenly occurred to him that no matter how fabulous our handouts, he couldn't see them and would need to get all the required content out of the course.

Arizona Psychodrama Institute opens each workshop, regardless of content, by covering logistical issues that would distract if left unmentioned (e.g. time of lunch, location of bathrooms, etc.) and we simply began by throwing it out there that we had a blind participant and that we really weren't sure how that was going to work out for anyone and that it was our intent to provide the highest quality workshop for everyone and that we'd look to everyone to co-create that experience. We were relieved at how open he was about the sorts of things he would need and the sorts of things he would need and he assured us he'd ask for things in the moment as he needed them.

Our first challenge was in having the group form the Well of Confidentiality popularized by Dorothy Satten. I have become quite skilled at giving the instructions for this exercise in a way that results in the proper construction of the well, having everyone use their thumbs, rather than have a number of stray pinky fingers in the well, that guides participants to assume a stance that allows the circle to close in tight enough for all to reach, and in the moment that I confidently began giving the directions, I became totally aware of how many gestures and physical demonstrations those instructions require and that our blind fellow wasn't going to see what I was doing. I needed to add verbal descriptions of the gestures I was making and this facilitated his successful joining of the well. However, just about 20 minutes into the full-day workshop, I began to think it was quite foolish to think pure spontaneity and creativity and the J.L.'s ghost was going to carry us through this novel experience. I became so nervous I almost had to vomit. However, I had no time for that as my very next activity was going to be totally useless as it relied heavily on making eye contact and I had to figure out what the heck I was going to do instead.

Moving on to the next scheduled activity, designed to help participants learn each others' names, I realized that throwing a ball to each other also wasn't going to work and I began to sweat as I found myself crossing that item off the agenda as well.

Moving along to the third item, I was relieved to see that it was a step-in circle. I knew he could hear just and step in with no problem. That exercise should work well... except if you think of what the

purpose is – to build the group by showing the commonalities the members share. When you step in and throw your curiosity into the circle, others step in to join you and you see who your compatriots are. He's not going to be able to see who's in the circle with him. Great. Now what?

Meanwhile, I had also realized that one of our participants had already, in the first half hour of our full-day workshop, demonstrated that she could only stand for very short periods of time and was not terribly mobile, either, so, although our blind participant could stand up and step in, she was not going to be able to. At that point, I was pretty much ready to cry, throw my agenda on the floor, refund everyone's money and drive 2 hours back to Phoenix and curl up in bed with my 3 cats. We hadn't even started any of the required material and so far we had nothing that was going to work.

So, the step-in circle was modified to be a “raise your hand” circle and I added that once all the hands were up, people with their hands up were to say their name out loud so that our blind participant would know who had their hands up and so that all of us could get to know each others' names. Well, not only did that work really well as an activity, the blind fellow heard everyone's names so many times, in their own voices, that he really learned who everyone was and for the rest of the workshop, he was able to track people he had never met before, by their voices.

Next up, several obligatory spectrograms, which should be simple, but now we needed to accommodate someone who couldn't move and someone who couldn't see the line of people to know where to place himself. I explained, verbally, what we were about to do and stated that we'd have everyone who could see and move place themselves first, talking amongst themselves as they place themselves on the line. Next, we would have the person who couldn't move show us where to place an object to represent her. Finally, we would have the blind man rate where he fell on the scale as a number from 1-10 and then we would walk him to that place on the line, but still have him talk to the people between which he was placed, to make sure he was in the correct location. It was clear he understood the task and was able to perform it as intended when he suggested to the gal on his right that she needed to move to the other side of him and she agreed and moved. A really neat surprise happened on the second spectrogram. After folks had placed themselves, people on the line spontaneously asked the sitter where she wanted her object and helped her find the right location by discussing it, and the blind guy was able to place himself by listening and using his cane to navigate. By the third spectrogram, you wouldn't have even known that we needed to modify the directions to begin with.

We addressed the issue of the handouts next and our sightless fellow assured us he would have the documents read to him and that this was a common practice of his. Suddenly, we were off the hook for having to make sure he got all the written information verbally and we could go back to modifying every exercise so that he could get the maximum benefit from the workshop. The participant who could not move really latched onto the notion of having the object stand in for her and she relished that she could still be in an active workshop without having to be any more active than she wanted to and she did, in fact, participate physically, in most of the activities, only using her stand-in from time to time during long periods of action.

Just about the time I was starting to feel elated that the workshop was going to be a success, I noticed our very next activity, which was to have participants put on sunglasses to concretize how we are affected by the cultural views bestowed upon us. Just drew a big “X” on that activity on my agenda and moved on to the next one, pretty concerned we'd be out of agenda items by lunch time. Next up, completing a 37-item self-assessment. A written self-assessment. Another large “X” on our agenda. Forget lunch, we're going to be out of activities by the time of the morning break. Next activity? Draw your cultural atom. Oh no! Another task this poor guy cannot do. We simply could not afford to throw

out another activity and still maintain enough content to fulfil continuing education requirements, so we just had to move on with that activity and ask him to imagine his in his head, rather than draw it on the page. He was perfectly comfortable with that option and sat comfortably, in thought, while others drew for about 10 minutes. When it came time to share, our eavesdropping revealed that he absolutely was talking about his cultural atom and that he had as clear a picture of his as anyone who had drawn theirs. Trusting that he'd ask for what he needed was working out and being spontaneous and creative in the moment, rather than rigidly bonded to the schedule was also working.

Adena directed a beautiful piece of action around a volunteer's cultural atom and although it was noted that neither the woman with limited mobility nor the blind individual were chosen for roles, there were lots of other attendees who were also not chosen and the sharing that followed was deep and seemed to indicate no one felt left out. We went ahead and let this exercise take about three times as much time as we had originally allotted for it, since we had already thrown so much out. No one seemed to act as if it were going on too long.

Next up was to be a highly vision-dependant use of fluid sculptures that we threw out, moving on to a guided imagery activity that worked out just dandy and brought us to the lunch hour.

When Adena and I facilitate workshops together, we take the first 5 minutes of the lunch as a break, then we spend 10 minutes together processing the workshop thus far, making any modifications of the afternoon agenda that are necessary, based on what we learned in the morning. That day, we just looked at each other and laughed, to indicate that we were both prepared to just pretty much throw out our whole agenda and punt for the next 3 hours. However, we recognized that although we were accommodating 2 people with special needs, everyone that registered paid to be in a workshop "in action" and we would not be providing what they paid for if we removed all the action. Thus, we decided to just keep the afternoon agenda as planned and let our special needs participants, who were quite comfortable in the group, participate to the extent they felt they could and ask for anything they needed so as not to alienate the whole rest of the group.

Afternoon spectrograms went smoothly as did the next activity, one that concretized the anxieties that lurk beneath ethical dilemmas. Our next activity involved milling around and all group members milled without incident. Our sightless man just boldly milled about, trusting the sighted to stay out of his way. That generally worked and the few resulting collisions didn't seem to harm anyone, possibly even contributing to participant fun.

Having safely warmed up and built an inclusive group, we then did two pieces of deep action around ethical dilemmas. Attendees shared about harrowing experiences they had with clients, and with the licensure board, several people sharing traumas they experienced when complaints were filed against them. One person even admitted to having had their license revoked and reinstated.

Having successfully made it to the end of a very challenging experience, I was crestfallen when I realized we still needed to do written evaluations to comply with CEU standards. My brilliant co-facilitator took the blind man's evaluation form, and simply informed him that he had to do a written evaluation and asked him how he'd like to go about that. He quickly and smoothly responded that she could read him the questions, he'd verbally answer, and that he wouldn't let it influence him that he was evaluating her while she sat with him reading the questions.

In addition to the required written evaluations, we ask for verbal feedback from the group at the end of each API workshop as we clearly benefit from receiving both the glowing reviews we typically get as

well as the suggestions for improvement that are offered. It is particularly helpful when one brave person states that they really hated a certain activity and we are able to see 4 additional heads nodding in agreement. We know that sort of feedback doesn't always make it to the written evaluations.

Our blind participant gave an almost tearful offering of gratitude for how included he had felt. He added that he has, on many occasions, walked out of other continuing education workshops, when he has felt like he wasn't going to benefit. Additionally, others in the group reported being touched at how we worked to accommodate people who needed it, letting them know that their needs would be fulfilled as well, should something arise for them. Finally, several people reported relief at our handling of the situation so head-on, as they are such care-takers that had we not accommodated him adequately, their attention would have been drawn to his plight and they would not have been able to learn as much from the content aspects of the workshop.

Our lessons were these: 1) The director must be the most spontaneous person in the room, but they don't have to be the only spontaneous person. 2) If you build a safe, inclusive group, great things will happen, 3) A director must not let disabilities frighten them, but rather trust the process. 4) If you find out, in advance, that you have special needs participants, it would be a really good idea to rework the agenda rather than just go in and try to wing it.