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Demonstration: Reminiscence using mandala – Workshop for those who may have memories

Abstract

Based on workshop the article introduces Mandala-method in reminiscence and as a pretext for drama. Artbased-methods and drama are used to discover memories. In the process participants of certain age group go together in groups to discuss various things that occurred during their youth and their childhood. Are memories alike everywhere? What similarities and differences could be found?

Keywords

Drama; Boreale; Explore; Express; Exchange; mandala; memory, storytelling;

This workshop was held in Drama Boreale in Silkeborg during the Nordic Conference on Drama Theatre and Education. 14 participants came from different Nordic countries. The aim was to present for the participants how to combine cross artistic methods (using music, painting, drama and poetry), which could be implemented easily in different environments. With mandala method the inner narratives can be shared and made into something more.

Short theory behind the workshop

Our focus was to make visible the memory based stories or inner narratives that the participants had. Hänninen (2000) defines inner narrative formation as a mental process by which people make sense of their lives and their situation. The narrativity develops in a cultural-historical context and consists of each participant’s individual stock of inner narratives.

By using mandala methods it is possible to share and make visible those memories that have happened in the shared socio-historical context. In sharing the people that tell stories or listen to stories, can as a community start remembering more of the things from the same period. The stories told can be made into a cross artistic action.

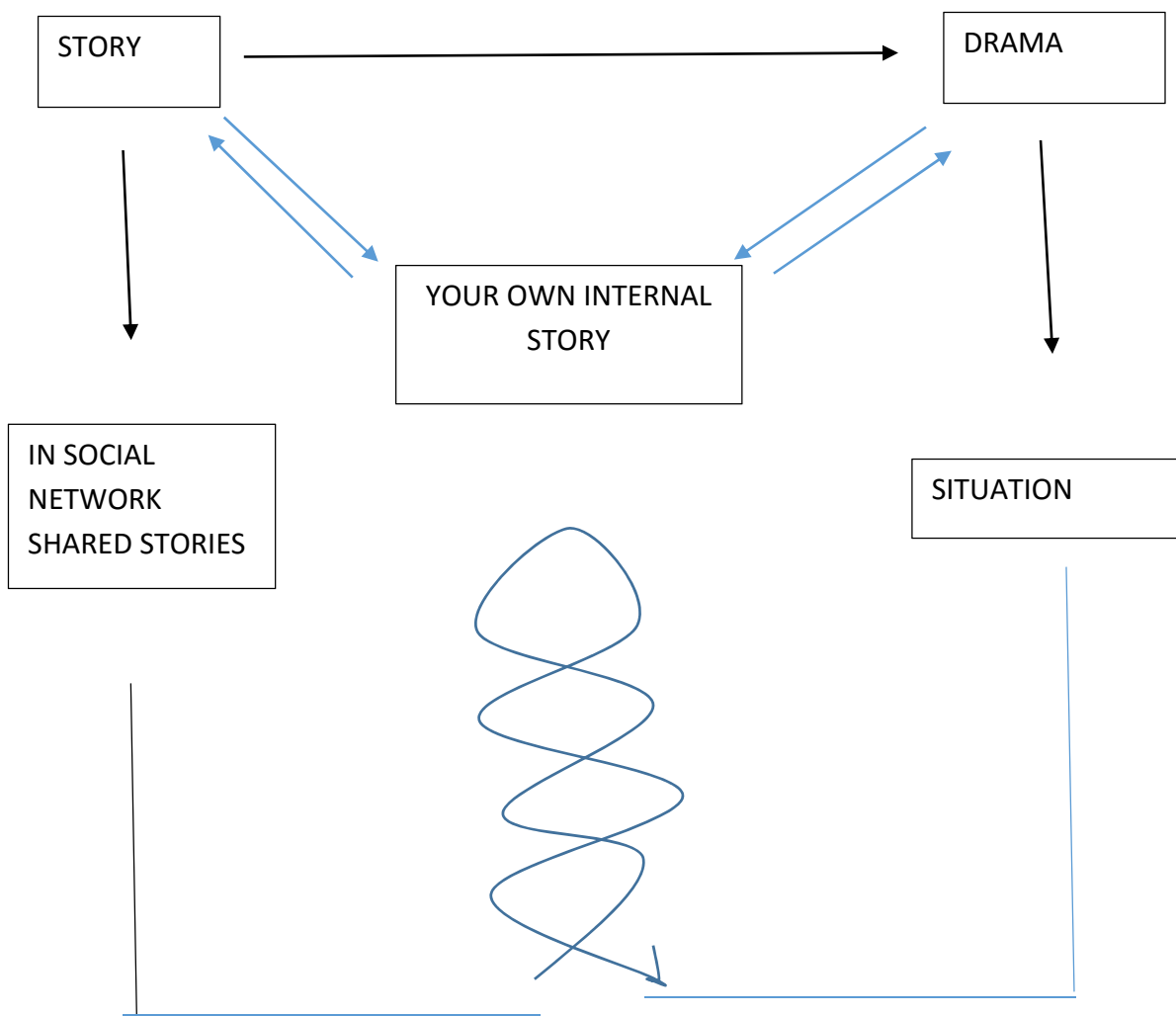


Figure: Story circulation based on Vilma Hänninen (2000)

The functions of inner narrative:

- Orientation in time
- Orientation in context
- Selective attention and categorization of experience
- Explanatory activity
- Identity formation
- Value orientation
- Desires, motivation and emotion

One may wonder whether the inner narratives may change our identity or rather are reflection upon the inner me. Are the stories that we tell:

- Something that we own?
- Something that we create and tell?
- Something that we are?

Reminiscence can be defined as: the act of remembering and telling about events and experiences from the past or:

1. The act or process of recollecting past experiences or events
2. An experience or event recollected
3. A narration of past experiences
4. An event that brings to mind a similar, former event

Pam Schweitzer defines reminiscence as sharing the past in the present. Reminiscence is about seeing and realising the dramatic potential in real life stories (Schweitzer 2007).

Remembering things is a basic need through which we relive and rebuild our lives and memories. We have a need to share things. We remember more while telling stories from our past. New things emerge from the forgotten past while other people from the same cohort or age group tell their stories.

Reminiscence is important to everyone but it is even more important if a person is losing her or his memories because of a disease such as Alzheimer's. The mandala method can be used as a tool of making memories alive again. In the workshop it is possible to accommodate to a person's cognitive ability level and make sharing memories a positive, meaningful experience. During the process the participants usually remember more and more during discussion. Everyone has memories and every memory is important.

Mandala

Mandala is a round picture, a circle, that represents the universe in some Eastern religions.

In various spiritual traditions, mandalas may be employed for focusing attention of practitioners and adepts, as a spiritual guidance tool, for establishing a sacred space, and as an aid to meditation induction. It represents the cosmos metaphysically and symbolically.

In this workshop, a mandala is circles within circles without gates. Mandala helps to focus on remembering together. In the second stage it can be used as a base for painting the memories with colours, prints or others methods. Mandala can also be big circles on the floor where the participants make their memories visible as movements or statues.

In the circles of mandala there is similarity with the Vygotskian zone of proximal development. The inner circle is about one's childhood and the outer circle is about adulthood and society: world and historical events. The circles experienced expand as the person gets older.

The workshop

Aims:

- *To remember* things together and to relive the past experiences (especially important when people may have memory losses)
- *To enhance* self confidence and enhance the feeling of appreciation

Possible other variations of the use of mandala could be studying a role, making a play from the memories shared (devising), studying history, understanding an era (my own or someone else's).

In the workshop mandalas are used for focusing the participants to a certain time period (for instance, youth and childhood) in their life and to express their experiences during that time. The participants share their memories, negotiate and choose what they want to put to the circles, one at a time. During the discussion the things mentioned are put into the circles of the mandala and during the process the circles are given names. In a way it is a method of building a universe of the memories the participants may share.

Stage 1:

In the first stage of the workshop people of the same age group remember together through the making of a mandala. The circles are made on a large paper.

- The innermost circle represents the participants, they can use their names or other personal symbols.
- The second circle represents the childhood experiences, the rhymes, songs, books, colours, toys etc.
- The third circle represents the surroundings and the neighbourhood, and in a timeline, it focuses on youth and shared memories with peers, such as idols, music, literature, movies, events, media, colours, tastes or must haves of the time.
- The fourth circle focuses on the events that occurred in the society and had an effect on persons and their lives and their society: fashion.
- The fifth is the level of the country and the memories are often historical events, olympic games, big celebrations but also riots and political episodes.
- Outside the circle is the area of the whole world and what happened there: things like walking on the moon.

In a sense the shared is being built during the conversations. Often more memories are remembered during the process

Stage 2:

The second stage: the participants are divided into four groups:

- Group 1: paints the mandala or makes collages using colors, or the prints that were used in their childhood. The people in the mandala (centre people) choose a colour or colours that represent their selves
- Group 2: makes a process drama of the person, her surrounding, her room and the important events mentioned in the mandala using drama conventions like statues, short impros, still images etc.
- Group 3: makes a poem based on the mandala. This usually involves the use of the word mandala during the process
- Group 4: makes sounds of the mandala, some music or voices of the mandala

There could also be a physical movement or dance group.

Stage 3:

The third stage: discussion and reflection upon the different experiences of the groups.

We divided the participants into groups with an imaginary line on the floor. The line represents the birth date decennier and the participants take position according their own birth time: fifties, sixties etc.

- 50's TV eyes for the whole world, Olympics 1964 Tokyo
- 60's Working in summer, wintersport/ skateing, feeling cold
- 70's Murder of Olof Palme
- 80's, 90's, 2000 Moomin, rap

All the groups had one common memory of Astrid Lindgren and her stories. That tells us a lot of Lindgren's work passing all generations.

We had previously decided to use different artforms in the final stage: music, creative writing, painting and drama conventions.

We noticed that writing poems in own mother tongue is more powerful than translation, written and spoken in English.

Perspectives

Conclusions from our experiences of previously done workshops:

- The workshop is designed so that it can be done with elderly people who may have physical disabilities
- The feelings after the workshop are positive and reminiscence starts and may continue many days after the workshop

- The workshop is suitable for groups consisting of only few participants, but it works also with big groups
- Collective memory and collective experience
- Facilitator must be aware of keeping up spirits and enhancing positive memories
- The workshop is also suitable as a tool for building up a role
- Good tool for a nurse: who is this person? what can I discuss with this person?
- Shared worldwide memories may unite people from different backgrounds “where were you when Kennedy died?”

Experiences with immigrants:

This workshop has been found very fulfilling and even therapeutic with Swedish-finnish born or living in Sweden all adulthood.

Reminiscence builds up a bridge between generations, combines people into the chain of generations and to culture. Even though memories are private they are also shared and memories builds up understanding within Finnish swedes and their history.

Reminiscence causes a chain reaction in which memories bring more memories and a circle of memories is built. Through this one gets understanding of one’s own and one’s kins. It also helps to understand also those who may have similar experiences and those with different kinds of experiences

We took verbatim memories as the basis for artistic workshop/performances using the memories of participants as a source of artistic production and creativity.

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