

Building resilience in youth with Therapeutic Spiral Model™ (TSM) psychodrama

Working with post-high-school youth in Bali, Indonesia

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Abstract This article in the journal *Zeitschrift für Psychodrama und Soziometrie* explores the foundations of resilience theory and the application of the Therapeutic Spiral Model™'s (TSM) form of psychodrama in building resilience in youth through increasing the internal locus of control and supporting the ability to internalize the positive regard of peers and adult mentors. The author describes a program developed to serve these goals while working with post-high-school youth, ages 17 to 19, in the Campuhan College Program in Bali, Indonesia.

Keywords Resilience · Psychodrama · Therapeutical Spiral Model · Youth · Secondary Education · Locus of control · Positive regard

Resilienzentwicklung bei Jugendlichen mit Hilfe des Therapeutischen Spiralmodells (TSM)

Arbeiten mit Jugendlichen in Bali, Indonesien

Zusammenfassung Dieser Artikel in der *Zeitschrift für Psychodrama und Soziometrie* befasst sich mit den Grundlagen der Resilienztheorie und der Anwendung des *Therapeutischen Spiralmodells* (TSM) zur Stärkung der Resilienz bei Jugendlichen. Durch Erhöhung der internalen Kontrollüberzeugung und Unterstützung der Resilienzfähigkeit soll eine positive Einstellung zu Gleichaltrigen und erwachsenen Mentoren verinnerlicht werden. Der Autor beschreibt ein Programm, das entwickelt wurde, um diese Ziele in der Arbeit mit Jugendlichen nach dem Abitur, im Alter von 17 bis 19 Jahren, im Rahmen des Campuhan-College-Programms in Bali, Indonesien, zu erreichen.

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Schlüsselwörter Resilienz · Psychodrama · Therapeutisches Spiralmodell · Jugend · Schulbildung · Internale Kontrollüberzeugung · Positive Rücksichtnahme

1 Introduction

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines *resilience* (as it applies to an individual) as “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.” There is a parallel to J. L. Moreno’s definition of *spontaneity* as “an adequate response to a new situation or a new and adequate response to an old situation” (Moreno 1953, p. 97).

Dr. Norman Garmezy, University of Minnesota, is generally credited with the seminal research on resilience and attempts to define what are now called *protective factors*—those aspects and experiences in a person’s life that equip them with the ability to rise above adversity (Konnikova 2016).

In 1989, the results of a three-decades-long study on resilience were published by Emmy Werner (Konnikova 2016). Her findings showed that a combination of environmental factors (such as the presence of a positive, caring adult in the lives of her subjects) as well as particular elements of personality (especially a belief in one’s own ability to affect the outcome of life situations) each had significant impact on the development of resilience.

In my work with adolescents both in the USA and in countries around the world, I have found the Therapeutic Spiral Model™’s form of psychodrama, referred to here as TSM Psychodrama (Hudgins 2019), to be an effective tool for developing and enhancing resilience in youth from diverse backgrounds and cultures (Cossa 2019, 2006). This article focuses on a specific intervention developed for working with a group of youth in Bali, Indonesia.

2 Factors that influence the development of resilience

Woznica (2018, p. 1) provides contemporary definitions of *resilience* and *protective factors* as follows:

Resilience in children is the ability to recover from traumatic experiences and develop the skills to overcome future challenges. In dealing with adversities, children draw from personal strengths often divided into external (I have), internal (I am), and interpersonal (I can) resources.

McCarthy (2017) described four factors as having the greatest significance in supporting young people to become resilient and to counteract the effects of adversity:

1. facilitating “supportive adult-child relationships”;
2. building “a sense of self-efficacy and perceived control”;
3. providing opportunities to develop “strong adaptive skills and self-regulatory capacities”; and

4. facilitating the ability “to mobilize sources of faith and hope, and cultural traditions.”

As a psychodramatist working for over three decades with at-risk youth, many of whom were survivors of childhood trauma, I have found that TSM Psychodrama offers effective therapeutic interventions for overcoming negative and often debilitating effects of childhood trauma. The therapeutic structures of the TSM have also proven effective in supporting youth from less dysfunctional backgrounds to meet the developmental challenges that contemporary adolescents face (Cossa 2006).

3 TSM psychodrama

Hudgins (2019) describes the efficacy of psychodrama for promoting spontaneity and creativity and building resilience. She defines the TSM as “a trauma-informed, stage-process model to change the self-organization of people affected by trauma by using experiential methods” (Hudgins 2019).

She also details the TSM’s use of the *Trauma Survivor’s Internal Role Atom (TSIRA)* to serve as a map that guides the safe and effective utilization of this psychodramatic model for promoting post-traumatic growth (Toscani and Hudgins 1995; Hudgins 2019, 2002).

A major focus of therapeutic and educational work with adolescents is building the capacity for healthy adult functioning (Cossa 2006). In working with youth, the TSIRA serves both as a map for healthy functioning and as a guide to support young people to move away from histories of abuse and into *Post-Traumatic Growth* (Hudgins 2019).

Within the TSIRA’s categories of role functions, the one known as *Prescriptive Roles* has the greatest application in adolescent work (Cossa 2006). *Prescriptive Roles* are those of healthy functioning that need to be in place before one can safely address trauma material. They are also examples of healthy, developmental milestones for adolescents, regardless of trauma history. The roles support the development of the abilities for: nonjudgmental observation; identifying personal, interpersonal and transpersonal strengths; and containment of affect (Israel 2019). *Transpersonal* strengths are those which are greater than the individual; including spirituality, a connection to one’s ancestors or culture, etc. One can see in *Prescriptive Roles* a reflection of the external, internal, and interpersonal strengths described by Woznica (2018) as well as the four factors highlighted by McCarthy (2017).

The remaining sections of this article describe how TSM Psychodrama served as a foundation for building resilience with the Balinese group.

4 Working with students at Campuhan College

Campuhan College attracts post-high-school youth from all over Bali. The program combines practical skills in English and computer science with more socially-focused skills in leadership and values education.

Balinese youth traditionally grow up in a community-based culture, living in multi-generational family compounds in which there is limited personal space. A majority of Balinese are Hindu, a religious and cultural tradition rich in ceremony. This expresses itself in daily practices of gratitude and frequent community rituals, such as: celebrating family events, seasonal commemorations, and acknowledging connections to all aspects of life. One of the challenges for the program at Campuhan is honoring the richness of the local culture while supporting contemporary youth in evaluating and coping with Western ideals and technology.

During 2016 and 2017, I worked with staff and students to introduce TSM Psychodrama into their program (Cossa 2019). During the first year we explored how the *Social/Cultural Atom* (S/C Atom) (Moreno 1953) of each member was changing and evolving. This was explored first on paper and then in action. The S/C Atom is a map of the meaningful, interpersonal and social connections in a person's life (imagine a map of Facebook friends and groups). To make the term more user-friendly and easier to translate we called it *The Circle of Your Life*. This social map indicates not only who and what connections are present, but also the nature of the connections (positive, indifferent, negative, etc.), and their relative significance (indicated by the distance from the icon representing self).

During our first session students drew the S/C Atom from their time before attending Campuhan. In a subsequent session we had them draw their present S/C Atom (some 7 months later). We noticed an increase in distance between students and others represented in their present Atoms compared to those from their time before (when *self* and *others* were drawn very close together). We also saw the inclusion of new significant connections. We used this growing awareness to explore, through sociodramatic action, the ways in which the students' lives and connections were transforming; to provide a foundation for exploring the ways in which they wanted to bring their cultural and ancestral connections into their adult lives (Cossa 2019).

For the class of 2017, we switched from a schedule of one, three-hour group per week over seven weeks, to a once-monthly meeting schedule over the program year. This enabled us to respond to the changing needs of the group as they became apparent.

A major focus of our work the second year was looking at ways in which students' relationships to their core values were evolving. The Campuhan program is informed by the work of The Values Institute in Java, Indonesia. The institute identifies twelve core values: cooperation, peace, respect, simplicity, responsibility, freedom, honesty, tolerance, happiness, love, unity, and humility. Our project was able to increase the use of action techniques to the exploration of these and other values.

Students coming into the 2018 program year had a high percentage of trauma backgrounds (physical and emotional, as well as neglect), as disclosed in the intake interviews. We decided to provide a two-day intensive using TSM Psychodrama at about the program's midpoint. The trained staff and I designed the intensive for their 25 students.

Many students come from families in which only Balinese is spoken. Their public-school classes are conducted in Indonesian. Although many spoke some English and all were learning the language as part of their coursework, English was a distant third, in terms of familiarity and usage frequency, so whatever I facilitated would

be translated into Indonesian. Since being able to work in one's first language can be important in accessing deep feelings, it became important that the local staff also were able to facilitate in Indonesian and Balinese as appropriate. When working in small groups, students could opt to use either language.

5 Day one

On the first day the students were welcomed and plans for the two days were set out. They were informed of the intense nature of the activities and that previous graduates had found the experience useful.

The students had seen me at the previous year's graduation, which they had all attended, and had heard about me from former graduates. Several of the staff, with whom these students had already built trust and safety, introduced me from the perspective of what they had learned about me while working together. By making these connections clear, we offered a link between the sociometry the students had developed with the staff and the sociometry the staff and former students had developed with me, so that I could move into the role of a caring and supporting adult. Since I would be demonstrating many significant activities during the two days, it was important for students to feel safe and connected with me as a leader.

Once the safe learning environment was in place, I took my role as facilitator with a staff, who'd previously been in the first class at Campuhan, as interpreter. I introduced the themes of the workshop: examining our lives, choosing messages that serve us in moving forward, and letting go of messages that hold us back. I provided a brief introduction to the process of psychodrama.

Two other staff members facilitated sociometric activities to warm the group up to action and to the action approach for examining facts and feelings. Two spectrograms were facilitated by the first of the staff members:

1. How far from Campuhan is my family's village? (This created a spectrum extending from *very near* to *farther than anyone*.)
2. How much have I changed since coming to Campuhan? (This created a spectrum extending from *not at all* to *more than I could have imagined*.)

During the spectrograms, I assessed how easily the students were able to participate in action activities and how aware they were of the tremendous changes they had already undergone while in the program.

Two locograms were used to measure a range of choices; facilitated by a second staff member:

1. Where in Bali is my family's village? (Students placed themselves on an imaginary map of Bali covering the working space.)
2. Which is my favorite subject at Campuhan College? (Students placed themselves in relationship to colored scarves representing each of the subjects.)

Students participated with ease and began noticing commonalities and differences that existed within their group.

Two more staff facilitated “Step-In Circles”. In this a volunteer student or staff member offers a thought or feeling while stepping into the inner circle. Others who feel the same way join them, indicating agreement or commonality for that experience. These were done in two rounds and focused on the following themes:

1. Ways I have changed for the better since coming to Campuhan.
2. Skills, values, and relationships I want to develop, reinforce or build before graduation.

A key tenet for using the TSM is that *Prescriptive Roles* must first be put in place before we can move safely into trauma material. To foster development of these roles, morning activities were focused on warming people up to sharing their own experience in a safe and supported environment in which they could operate from positions of strength.

We wanted all the staff to step forward as facilitators for the first time with this group of students, especially since these staff members would each be facilitating small group activities as the workshop progressed. Our final activities before lunch were led by the two staff who had yet to take the lead.

The *Hand-on-Shoulder* activity explores existing connections within the group. One of the remaining staff members led two rounds of this activity, in which other staff did not participate. The directions were “Put your hand on the shoulder of the person who:

1. you think you know the best and thank them for being open to you;
2. you think knows you the best and thank them for seeing you.”

For the second criterion, staff members could be chosen by the students, but would not participate in choosing. Our last staff member took over at this point. “Put your hand on the shoulder of the person who you would like to know better and tell them why.”

All the sociometric activities helped us: assess students’ readiness to engage; warmed the group up to action techniques; helped to make visible the many, strong interpersonal connections already existing within the group; and supported the development of new, positive connections.

Students were randomly divided into six small groups, each facilitated by one of the staff members, to share what it was like for them to do this type of activity and to bring closure to the morning.

After lunch, we reconnected with a sound-and-movement warm-up that had become a tradition since the 2016 psychodrama group. Students were familiar with the sequence and three participants led the slow, medium, and fast iterations. The rest of the group joined in with enthusiasm. We were having fun while reinforcing interpersonal strengths and kinesthetically building a sense of group cohesion.

During lunch we laid out a mandala of cards containing animal images in the center of the room. After our warm-up, I explained the concept of the TSM Observing Ego (OE) (Hudgins 2019), although we used the term, *Compassionate Witness*, that I first heard from one of my TSM colleagues, Linda Ciotola. It is more user-friendly and easier to translate into Indonesian.

The OE is that part of our Internal Role Atom that allows us to witness our lives from a distance, without judging, shaming, or blaming. To develop an internal locus of control, it is important to build and reinforce the ability to view our own actions honestly and take responsibility without contamination by the shaming and blaming messages of the *Internalized Perpetrator* and *Abandoning Authority* (Hudgins 2019).

As is traditional in TSM workshops, participants select images and then share with a partner. Each participant places their image somewhere on the walls and windows around the room to be available when needed.

It is often difficult for adolescents, especially those from Asian cultures, to identify and name their own strengths, either because they do not see themselves as having any and/or because one does not customarily or comfortably say positive things about oneself. We worked through a series of steps and activities to help students claim their *Personal Strengths*.

Cards were prepared ahead of time, on which descriptors of various strengths were printed, in both Indonesian and English. In addition to the core values some examples were: *caring friend, hard worker, courageous, persistent, etc.* Staff used their knowledge of the students to create cards that reflected strengths they had already observed in the students as well as those they had noticed beginning to emerge in some.

Cards were arranged on the floor around the room. A staff member instructed students to go to the card whose listed strength they felt they had the most of, even if it was just a little. Students ended up in small groups standing next to selected cards. They were given a minute to create a sound and movement to demonstrate the strength they had chosen and these were presented to the entire group.

Another staff member asked students to select a card that represented a strength they wanted more of in their lives. Once students made choices, staff combined resulting small groups until we had six groups of about the same size, with a staff member to facilitate each group.

The next activity, *Seat of Appreciation*, was modelled by staff in a series of steps. We told the students to:

- Select a chair to serve as your Seat of Appreciation.
- Decorate it with colored scarves to provide a throne-like appearance.
- Decide the order: each group member takes a turn sitting in the seat.
- During a person's turn, each remaining member and the facilitator offer an appreciation of a strength they have witnessed being shown by the person in the chair.
- As members offer each appreciation, the seated student accepts the strength by repeating it in the first person. For example, if someone says: "I appreciate how you helped me in computer class," the seated student would reply: "Yes, I help others in class."
- The staff member facilitating the small group takes the final turn in the seat, so s/he can also be appreciated and accept the appreciations offered.
- The group discusses what it was like to give and receive appreciations and to accept those given to each of them.
- We re-assembled into the full group for a group debrief: the staff member or a student volunteer offers a brief summary of the group discussion.

By giving and receiving appreciations, group members acknowledged, built, and reinforced *Interpersonal Strengths* while supporting each member to claim their Personal Strengths. By having staff participate, we reinforced the members' connections to positive, caring adults.

The next step in our process was to reinforce relationships for participants to the peers and adults in their lives outside of Campuhan who also offer positive, caring messages. We used a modified S/C Atom in this activity.

We gave each student a large envelope and some colored pens. After providing an introduction to the S/C Atom, we invited students to draw their own current S/C Atom on the front of the envelope, but only to include people, groups and cultural influences from whom or which they had received positive messages of support (defined as "messages that move you forward into a positive future"). We invited them to add "speech bubbles" to record some of the positive messages; the students shared their envelopes in pairs.

Our final activities focused on claiming *Transpersonal Strengths* (Hudgins 2019) and reinforcing each participant's ability to choose two of McCarthy's (2017) factors: "mobilizing sources of faith, hope, and cultural traditions" and "building a sense of self-efficacy and perceived control". The ability to choose, in the here-and-now, helps foster the internal role that the TSM calls *The Containing Double*. This is especially significant for trauma survivors. They did not choose their traumatic experience, and supporting choice in the present reinforces movement toward post-traumatic growth.

We used the TSM's tradition of selecting colored scarves to represent each person's currently-identified Transpersonal Strength(s). Instead of placing scarves in a large circle, we conducted a Step-In Circle. As each group member named their Transpersonal Strength, they stepped into the center of the circle and laid down their scarf, thus creating a small nest of scarves in the center. Other group members took a step into the circle if someone named a strength they also had. When all the members of the group and staff had placed their scarves, we mentioned that we had created a traditional Balinese *canang* (pronounced *Cha-nang*), or offering basket; part of the Hindu daily ritual of gratitude. We left the *canang* in place overnight to serve as a reminder of the Transpersonal Strengths to begin our work on Day 2.

For *Closing Circle*, each person said, "My name is ..., and I am choosing ..." Each participant stated a value or personal gift for their future. We invited students to use their after-school time differently, suggesting they reflect on the day, or write in their journals, or talk with another student about their experiences instead of going immediately to their cell phones. We reminded them about confidentiality.

6 Day two

After a physical warm-up we re-connected participants to the strengths they had named and discovered on Day 1. We left the scarves placed by staff in the *canang* of the Transpersonal in place, surrounding a bowl of flowers. We invited students to move their transpersonal scarves into a large circle, as each person recalled and named their Transpersonal Strength. Each member was invited to add a scarf to represent a Personal Strength from Day 1. By this point, the circle was large enough

that the entire group could stand or sit both inside and outside the circle. This is the traditional TSM's *Circle of Experience*.

To ground people in the strength-focused work of the previous day, we distributed slips of paper on which to write the name of someone who supports them (one of their Interpersonal Strengths from Day 1). Slips were placed in the center canang. Many of the group members folded their paper into origami shapes. Standing outside the scarf circle, each member was asked to step into the circle and make a statement, such as, "My name is ... and today I choose to call on my strength of ... as I move forward." Thus fortified, we were ready to begin encountering negative messages.

Envelopes from the first day were distributed and students asked to draw a containing border around the perimeter of the envelope using words and images to represent their strengths. Pencils with erasers were used to add people, groups, etc., that have given messages that "hold you back or keep you stuck." If any of the people were also among those who provide positive messages, students were to draw another representation of that person in pencil to distinguish the positive part from the negative. They added speech bubbles containing the words of some of the negative messages in pencil.

Once they shared this experience with a partner, participants wrote each of the negative messages on a separate slip of paper. We instructed them to erase the negative messages on the envelopes, as a symbolic gesture concretizing the act of "taking charge of these messages rather than have the messages take charge of me". There remained faint traces on the envelope, but these were no longer dominant images.

The main activity of the day was focused on letting go of as many of the negative messages as possible. We demonstrated the activity before dividing the members into six small groups with one staff member facilitating. The activity progressed at the pace appropriate to each group. I remained in a consulting capacity to offer additional support as needed.

The steps and set-up of the activity were:

- Sitting in the Chair of Appreciation, the protagonist connects to support of the group by making eye contact with each member.
- The protagonist names some of the positives/strengths on his/her envelope.
- An empty chair faces the protagonist. Remaining group members sit on the floor.
- The protagonist takes the slips of paper from their envelope.
- If s/he feels ready, the protagonist gives the message back, saying something like, "I give this message back to you ..." (inserting the name); "it does not serve me."
- The slip with this message is put into a group envelope that holds all the returned messages for the group.
- If the individual is not ready to give the message back, s/he may say: "I'm not ready to give this back to you just yet, but I'm not going to let it be so strong in my life." The message is then returned to the individual's envelope.
- When each group has completed the activity, they process in their small group until the large group re-convenes.

Consciously choosing which messages to give back is important and, having the power to choose, and knowing their choice would be honored by the rest of the group, most returned all of their messages to the group envelope.

After our full-group processing, we asked what the members felt should be done with the returned messages. As one voice and without hesitation, they replied, “burn them”. We moved to a safe and appropriate space outside to perform this ritual. The ensuing ceremony of giving these messages back to the universe was conducted both with honor and with joy.

The workshop ended with a final activity in small groups in which each student walked three positions on a timeline and gave a soliloquy for each. The positions were: *who I was before*, *who I am now*, and, *who I choose to be in my future*. Small and large group processing led to a Closing Circle in which each person claimed the cards and scarves that represented the inner roles they had shared. They reflected on how these roles may have changed over the two days of working together.

7 The post-test

In the TSM, we use the research term, *post-test*, to refer to demonstrated behavior(s) which indicate that old patterns of thought, belief, and/or action have changed and healthier, transformative roles are emerging. For this group, I witnessed an amazing post-test when I attended their graduation five months later. It was a testament to the work we had done as well as to the transformative nature of the Campuhan program itself. As part of their graduation ceremony, the students created a musical/dramatic presentation to reflect their experiences in the program.

Theirs began with a dance/movement piece in which one of the students became isolated from the rest and heard all the negative messages encountered in life: “you’re not good enough,” “you are stupid,” “you’re too fat,” etc. Dancers surrounded this *isolate* and the messages drove her into a position of helplessness on the floor. After a dramatic moment of silence, two voices were heard from off-stage, singing the opening lines from the song *This is Me* from the movie *The Greatest Showman*:

I’m not a stranger to the dark; hide away, they say,
'cause we don’t want your broken parts.

As the fallen isolate heard these words, her head slowly rose and her tear-filled eyes opened wide as the message of the song transformed into affirmation:

But I won’t let them break me down to dust.
I know that there’s a place for us, for we are glorious.

The young woman rose to her feet and began singing with the off-stage voices. In moments, the playing space was transformed into a celebration of self-acceptance, as one by one, the rest of the graduates joined in the song. I was moved to tears as were many in the audience; watching these incredible young people give voice to whom they had become.

8 Conclusions

The ability to bounce back from adversity is essential to physical, mental, and emotional health and key to emotional resilience. Research has demonstrated that there are environmental and personal factors that enhance resilience and that these Protective Factors can be developed, enhanced, and reinforced. TSM Psychodrama has been shown an effective tool for building resilience in youth as well as adults as they address each of McCarthy's (2017) protective factors.

Sociometric activities and working with the Prescriptive Roles of Personal and Interpersonal Strengths support youth in building, recognizing, and reinforcing the power of strong relationships as well as one's own innate abilities. The dual focus, on working from a position of strength and by choice, also enhances these Protective Factors. The Observing Ego provides experiences enabling regulation of intense affect as participants can choose to return negative messages to their sources.

At a time when modern psychiatry was trying to develop a science of mind that relegated religion to the realm of superstition, J. L. Moreno pointed out the importance of the cosmic nature of humans (Moreno 1953.) The TSM carries on his tradition by recognizing the importance of the Transpersonal and bringing those strengths fully into play for counteracting the causes of trauma and supporting post-traumatic growth (Hudgins 2019).

Rosenthal (2015) has stated: "Trauma creates change you don't choose. Healing is about creating change you do choose." The TSM's form of psychodrama offers a methodology that provides young people, regardless of trauma history, a means to choose resilience as they move into healthy adult functioning.

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