



An analysis of the first articulation of drama therapy: Austin's 'Principles of Drama-Therapy: A Handbook for Dramatists' (1917)



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ABSTRACT

The article offers the field the first analysis of the earliest book on drama therapy: 'Principles of Drama-Therapy: A Handbook for Dramatists' (Austin, 1917). It reviews the nature of accounts of drama therapy's history in the literature, and includes an analysis of Austin's work in relation to the field's accounts of its own history and in creating dialog with contemporary concerns in drama therapy literature. The review argues that Austin's contribution to the theoretical origins of drama therapy offers a historical, theoretical perspective for contemporary concerns with performance and the nature of different aspects of theater process in relation to healing.

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Introduction

After reviewing the nature of accounts of drama therapy's history in the literature, this article offers the field the first analysis of the earliest book on drama therapy: 'Principles of Drama-Therapy: A Handbook for Dramatists' (Austin, 1917). The examination is situated in practices that engage with historical documents as a means both of understanding the development of a discipline and also as a way of creating insight and dialog with contemporary concerns in theory, research and practice. This approach is based on Pocock's (2005), Schwartz and Colman's (1988) and Sedgwick, Cockburn, and Trentham's (2007) valuing of the examination of historical documents in the understanding of the development of a discipline. Pocock (2005) and Schwartz and Colman (1988), for example, have noted that it is unlikely that those researching the origins of a profession 'can prove that one event or idea 'caused' the profession to develop as it did' (1988, p. 242). However, they argue for the value of the examination of accounts and sources to understand both the nature of historical development, but also to examine 'sets of ideas': creating dialog between past and present in order to 'contribute to the profession's evolution' (1988, p. 242). Sedgwick et al. identify the 'importance of historical documents and archival practices in facilitating reflection' (2007, p. 415) and in helping to 'understand the influences on the development of a profession' (2007, p. 409). They also suggest that examining 'congruencies between past and present professional discourse (2007, p. 414) deepen a profession's understanding of its development and identity.

Drawing on these perspectives, this article's analysis of Austin's work examines its value in relation to the field's accounts of its own history and in creating dialog with contemporary concerns in drama therapy literature.

Histories of drama therapy: a review of the literature

The history of drama as a form of therapy is an emergent area of academic concern. Prior to the work of Jones (1996, 2007), Casson (1997, 2000, 2001) and Johnson (1999), the tendency in English language literature was to situate the term and the discipline as originating in the late 1950s and 1960s. Accounts in this literature that emerged in the 1970s and early 1980s (Jennings, 1973; Lindkvist, 1981; Schattner & Countney, 1981; Wethered, 1973), represented the perceptions of a generation of innovators developing drama therapy during this time. These focus solely, or primarily, on the emergence of drama therapy in England and the USA. They tended to be self authored accounts based on the experience of the individual (Schattner, 1981, pp. xix–xxiv) or drawing on frameworks exemplified by Jennings who cites the 'earliest emergence' as due to the 'several influences' that 'came together in the late fifties and early sixties to help change the prevailing atmosphere' (1981, p. 56). Jennings connects these 'shifts' in the 'sixties and seventies' with the emergence of the term from areas such as drama 'with depressed and deprived groups . . . the Remedial Drama Centre developed into the Dramatherapy centre' (1981, pp. 56–57). In her 1987 text, Jennings reflected many in the UK's perceptions that 'it began in the UK in the early 1960s' (1987, p. xiii).

Jones (1996, 2007), Casson (1997, 2000, 2001) and Johnson (1999) mark a shift in this tradition. Subsequent literature frequently cites these sources in orientating the terms or early development of drama therapy, and their perspectives have

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become the norm within the field (Andersen-Warren & Grainger, 2000; Bailey, 2006; Johnson, Emunah, & Lewis, 2009; Landy, 2001; Langley, 2006). Casson and Jones traced drama therapy's origins within the literature, representing a shift away from personal accounts. Jones discusses origins broadly, examining wider historical trends from early societies (1996, pp. 43–46), through to more recent developments in many countries from the eighteenth century onwards (1996, pp. 46–55), referring to documented practice since the 1930s and tracing the emergence of practices and terminology (1996, pp. 71–95). This included the first attention within the drama therapy literature of Reil's nineteenth century work in asylum theaters (Jones 1996, p. 47), Russian Evreinov's (1927), Theatrotherapy (1996, pp. 54–57) and Iljine's work with Therapeutic Theater between 1908 and 1917 (1996, pp. 57–61). Casson created a detailed and thoroughly researched genealogy (1997a). His work developed the field's understanding of Reil (2001) and the relationship between Evreinov and Moreno (1997a, 1999) looking at areas such as monodrama.

Casson, Johnson, and Jones reposition drama therapy in three important and different ways. They, firstly, draw on literature to evidence history rather than personal accounts. Secondly, they connect drama therapy to practice and theory existing outside of England and the USA in the 1950s and 1960s. Thirdly, they begin to theorize the history of drama therapy. Rather than offering a narrative account, they develop a theoretical analysis of the development of drama therapy, recently continued by Johnson et al. (2009). Casson analyses the development and discovery of intersecting disciplines such as psychodrama, theater and educational drama. He considers the inter-relationship between emergent practices and theories ranging from Futurist experiments in Russia, 1919–1921, with the 'Living Newspaper' and Moreno's work with the 'dramatized newspaper' (Casson, 2000) to Foulkes' experiments with Moreno's psychodrama and sociodrama in the period 1943–1945 at Northfield Hospital under the title 'Enactive Therapy' (Foulkes, 1983, 115 cited in Casson, 2000). Johnson also theorizes a developmental process consisting of 'exploration' where techniques were 'invented' and the 'effects' were observed in a variety of client contexts (1999, p. 14), followed by a stage typified as analysis and communication described by him as 'categorization' where this variety of processes are articulated and compared (1999, p. 14). He theorizes the third stage as 'conceptualization' in which various 'categories of events are organized into meaningful relationships to each other through a theory' (1999, p. 14). Johnson further frames this later stage into two phases: the first 'imports' or borrows from other conceptual models such as 'Gestalt' or 'behavioral' frameworks (1999, p. 15). The second is described as a more complex and sophisticated development where the arts therapies are used 'to enhance or improve these theories' (1999, p. 15). Johnson articulates well the need for the field to understand how it is 'the result of historical processes' in understanding the field's 'function' and 'to articulate it meaningfully' (1999, p. 27). Jones also creates a developmental understanding based on a review of literature and on interview, conceptualized into three stages. The first involves drama or theater undertaken in clinical or 'special educational' contexts with an emphasis on creativity and entertainment or recreation (2007, pp. 46–47). The second phase is typified by accounts and understandings involving drama positioned as 'an adjunct to therapeutic processes', needing 'the context of another "accepted" form of therapy to be effective or safe' such as verbal psychotherapy or occupational therapy (2007, p. 48). The third is conceptualized as asserting drama as 'the primary medium of change and as a therapy in its own right' (2007, p. 48). Recent texts such as Johnson (2009, pp. 5–15) and Bailey (2006) have incorporated these and other accounts into the development of a family tree and a table, focusing more on the USA. Johnson et al. (2009) position history and interdisciplinarity within a valuable

theorized frame. They argue that 'our reliance upon other fields for our foundations has been of some concern to creative arts therapy scholars, who on the whole have expressed strong desire for independent theories for our disciplines' (2009, p. 17) citing Jones' position that, 'too often in the past theorists and practitioners have had to look outside drama therapy itself to try to justify its relationship to change, to find clothing which is made up of items from others wardrobes' (Jones, 1996, p. 29, cited in Johnson et al., 2009, p. 17) and Landy's argument that the field needed 'to discover a new or comprehensive model which reflects the creative, expressive nature of drama therapy' (Landy, 1994, p. 44). They propose a conceptual framework based on 'phases'. Key to this analysis of drama therapy's professional development is a movement from praxis to broader understanding of the impact of methodology and finally to theoretical articulation. The first is typified as practitioner engagement in direct clinical experience, developing methods and speculating about new possibilities based on their individual, personal engagement. The second phase involves publication and dissemination of case studies, with the third involving broader connections between case study with diverse populations being tested in new areas. The fourth is seen as the ultimate stage and involves publication of comprehensive descriptions of original theory.

The above review can be used to conclude that there are parallels and differences in the literature's development of its understanding of its history. The theorizing of drama therapy's history has, as a commonality, a conceptual developmental framework which positions and understands the emergence of the field. This posits a developmental process of individual practitioners making independent discoveries about drama and theater in their own practices in different fields, this is followed by communication with others and notions of 'unease' with existing professional boundaries, professional identities and terminology. This is followed by accounts of case study work and the creation of groupings of 'like-minded individuals' resulting in professional associations and finally the creation and publication of theorized understandings of drama therapy and research (Bailey, 2006; Casson, 1997, 2000, 2001; Johnson et al., 2009; Johnson, 1999; Jones, 1996; Landy, 2001).

However, in contrast to such commonalities, the literature contests areas such as the emergence of the term 'drama therapy'. Accounts published after Jones's citation in his revision of the field's history (1996), tend to indicate that this was Peter Slade in 1939 (Casson, 1997; Langley, 2006). As late as 2006, though, published articles can assert that, despite previous accounts of Slade in the literature, 'Lewis Barbato is credited with coining the term in print in 1945 (Bailey, 2006, p. 216). The following material reveals and analyses the first published articulation and conceptualization of the term 'drama-therapy', and examines its role in understanding the history and nature of drama therapy.

Principles of Drama-Therapy (1917): the first use of the term and the first book

To date no account of the history has engaged with the first published book on drama therapy, 'Principles of Drama-Therapy: A Handbook for Dramatists' (Austin, 1917), which predates Peter Slade's use of the term by two decades. Austin situates his substantial, one hundred and thirty paged treatment as original, as there was 'little or no body of past experience to which appeal may be made by way of illustration' (1917, p. ix). He creates an initial analogy for 'drama-therapy' (1917, p. ix) with the development of terms such as 'psycho-therapy' by orientation in Greek – from 'therapy' to heal or to cure, and 'psycho' meaning soul – bringing together therapy with what he calls 'modifying terms' as the 'art or science of healing by means, or through the instrumentality, of the soul'

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