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BOOK REVIEWS

ZA OPONOU EMOCÍ: TEORIE A PRAXE DRAMATERAPIE ('BEHIND THE CURTAIN OF EMOTIONS: DRAMA THERAPY THEORY AND PRACTICE'), PETR KOSEK, JAKUB VÁVRA, LENKA VEITOVÁ, LENKA POLÁNKOVÁ, MARTIN DOMINIK POLÍNEK, ZUZANA ŠEVČÍKOVÁ AND MARTINA ŽEMBOVÁ (2026)

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Studying to become a drama therapist can be exciting as well as unnerving, with emergent yet limited mainstream recognition of what Landy et al. (2005) described as a rather 'unconventional' profession. In some countries, drama therapy remains hidden within systems of mental health and well-being support. In the Czech Republic, two possibilities of studying drama therapy are available – via a course in Developmental Transformations (DvT) accredited by the Czech Association of Dramatherapists or at Palacký University leading to a degree in special education. However, the profession of drama therapist is not yet recognized at the legislative level. Czech drama therapists navigate the contexts of national health, social care and education systems where western ideas of clinical practice are not always automatically transferrable.

Landy et al. (2005) emphasized that drama therapy educators played the roles of guides, providing much-needed clarification to aid a sense of containment. While textbooks from the field cannot substitute for mentors nor provide full scripts, they can serve as stage notes guiding drama therapists in navigating their identity building in interdisciplinary dialogues. While the textbook is published in print in Czech language, this book review aims to serve the purpose of informing colleagues about the developments in drama therapy across the world.

Following the fifth edition (Valenta et al. 2021) of the key drama therapy text in the Czech Republic originally written by Professor Milan Valenta (1999), this textbook, newly published by his students, continues and extends the Palacký University, Olomouc drama therapy tradition. With the foreword written by Valenta, the textbook focuses on issues of practising drama therapy, expanding knowledge on drama therapy approaches and the drama therapy process. It contextualizes drama therapy in the national policy landscape and localized professional traditions by offering explanations and comparisons, conceptually positioning drama therapy in conversation with psychological and sociological theories, acknowledging its cross-disciplinary resonances.

The publication serves as a guide that provides a structure and safe containment to a drama therapy student without simplifying the profession. The authors add thoughtful, truthful reflections of their own practice that illustrate the presented theoretical concepts. The almost intimate sharing of experience instils a feeling of gratitude and respect towards the vulnerability of more experienced colleagues who generously offered insights into their practice and explained complex ways of critical thinking and reasoning.

The text is descriptive enough to explain concepts while also analytical enough to prompt thinking about theoretical grounding, competencies and the professional frameworks of drama therapy. It captures a wide picture of drama therapy theory and practice. While the authors in the beginning explain that theory presents a way of reflecting on what happens in practice, the publication's explanatory character simultaneously aims to lead future practice. The authors reflectively and with respect acknowledge the limitations of their own interpretations of theories, while their analysis is underpinned by their in-depth study and own practitioner experience. Their understanding of drama therapy approaches is evidenced by a wide range of references to relevant historic key literature and current drama therapy research.

The authors explain the contexts of different understandings or definitions of drama therapy, exploring drama therapy's theoretical background with reference to literature internationally and in the national context. Such meaningful integration of locally relevant traditions with key developments of the field in North American and European contexts is a significant contribution to the publication, which explicitly helps readers navigate terminology and appropriately situate their professional competencies. In this way, the authors manage to define drama therapy in a complex and contextualized manner from a variety of perspectives.

As the publication title suggests with its playful drama therapy metaphor, emotions are key in drama therapy practice, and the book reflects this in its recurrent themes of expression, catharsis and distancing. These are not only seen as methods of working with emotions but rather as ever-present threads of drama therapy conceptual thinking, for example through containment (Bion 1963).

The introduction is written in a narrative style, with the authors situating themselves as storytellers. As the text gradually changes into a critical reflective discussion of theory, history and contexts of drama therapy, they become guides who provide structure and high clarity. The chapters are logically organized, and despite being written by different authors, the 'storyline' is continued with consistent definitions and operationalizations of terms and concepts.

Chapter 1, written by Petr Kosek and Lenka Veitová, defines drama therapy through the lens of its historical development, drawing on Jones's (2007)

categorization of drama for health, drama in therapy and drama as therapy. The authors trace different sources for drama therapy, including performative genres (Schechner 2017; Valenta 2023), play (Axline 1969), games (Spolin 1963), theatre (Grotowski 1999), ritual (Jennings 1992), drama and dramatic reality (Courtney 1989; Pendzik 2006; Boal 1979; Moreno 1987). The chapter then explains the positioning of drama therapy within the clinical field as therapy, discussing its affinity to psychotherapy or creative art therapies, before proceeding to define it through its unique characteristics as a standalone field. However, in the Czech Republic, compared to psychotherapists, drama therapists are not recognized in legislation and cannot open private clinical practice unless they also train as psychotherapists in a more 'traditional' approach. University graduates possess competencies of special educators providing support interventions in health care, social services or education that are generally referred to as 'therapies'.

Chapter 2, written by Jakub Vávra, Zuzana Ševčíková and Lenka Veitová, focuses on processes in drama therapy, emphasizing the triangular relationship (Jones 2021). Professional ethics are critically discussed, which is a unique and significant contribution to regional literature. The authors refer to North American, British and European standards of drama therapy associations that the Association of Drama Therapists in the Czech Republic aligns with and discuss issues related to ongoing explicit consent in embodied encounters (Butler 2020), as well as the professional ethics of seeking supervision. This chapter guides drama therapists in preparing the set and setting, matching clients with therapists, assessing needs, goal setting, selecting appropriate approaches for working and contracting in individual or group scenarios with adults or children and their guardians. The authors use metaphorical theatre language for the subheadings of this chapter, for example talking about what is going on 'behind the scenes' before the process starts or 'entering the stage' once interaction with the clients begins. Each stage of the process is supplemented by case study reflections of drama therapists, including their clinical reasoning and uncertainties they grappled with. The chapter concludes by summarizing the theory of change behind the drama therapy process, describing its change mechanisms (De Witte et al. 2021) of emotional regulation, cognitive reframing, socialization, embodiment, sensory and aesthetic experience in conversation with the transtheoretical model of change (Prochaska and Norcross 2018) and Jones's (2007, 2021) core processes in drama therapy empirically validated by Frydman et al. (2022).

Chapter 3, written by Petr Kosek, discusses play, drawing on Peter Slade (1995) and Richard Courtney (1989). Czech authors such as Eva Machková (2018), who pioneered drama education in the country, are discussed in comparison with Sue Jennings (1992) and the developmental perspectives of Garry Landreth (2012).

Chapter 4 outlines approaches with major influence on drama therapy in the Czech Republic. Chapter 4.1, written by Petr Kosek, continues with the developmental perspectives in drama therapy by exploring Sue Jennings's (2011) models of neurodramatic play and the Embodiment-Projection-Role model, discussing them in light of attachment theory, the concept of containment and sensory play. Chapter 4.2, written by Lenka Veitová, leads readers through the history, philosophy and sources of Johnson and Pitre's (2021) DvT, explaining the theory of instability and being present in the moment and their implications for goals and components of DvT. In addition, Veitová describes a DvT session and an array of specific techniques with explicit rationale

illustrating and explaining theory. Chapter 4.3, written by Jakub Vávra, explains role theory and method, summarizing Robert Landy's (2009) approach and Vávra's practitioner experience in applying the approach, comparing these concepts with Kohut's and Doyle's self-object theory and Scheff's understanding of catharsis. Chapter 4.4, written by Petr Kosek, positions therapeutic theatre as a drama therapy approach, differentiating between therapeutic theatre defined by Bailey (2009) and other forms of theatre for therapeutic purposes or social inclusion commonly used in the Czech Republic. Petr Kosek and Martina Žembová further describe CoActive Therapeutic Theatre (CoATT) by Wood and Mowers (2024), referring to the theoretical model and their practice experience with its implementation.

Chapter 5 provides an overview of associated approaches and includes Chapter 5.1, written by Petr Kosek, on Moreno's psychodrama, sociodrama and sociometry prevalent in the Czech Republic due to their established implementation by Stanislav Kratochvíl. Chapter 5.2 on Playback Theatre, also written by Petr Kosek, refers to Fox and Salas (2021) and the work of Veronika Michovská (previously Nýdrlová), who established Playback Theatre in the Czech Republic. Lenka Polánková continues with Chapter 5.3 on Boal's (1979) Theatre of the Oppressed, drawing also on her own experience and previous publications, as well as the work of other local authors such as Dana Moree and Liza Urbanová (2023). The final Chapter 5.4, written by Martin Dominik Polínek, shares his experience and explains how the Russian approach of plastic theatre developed by Natalia T. Popova (2010) is applied in an inclusive theatre and understood as a drama therapy-related approach.

The Conclusion invites readers into a dialogue that will further advance the drama therapy journey.

The book contributes to shaping professional identities of drama therapists, as well as the identity of drama therapy itself. Interpretations of theories are transferred from the international context and melted into national conditions, continuously shaping its identity by connecting the work of local authors and the developments in drama therapy nationally with wider theoretical and philosophical perspectives. It is eclectic in its nature with a systematic rationale.

The publication serves as study material for readers with varied levels of previous knowledge about drama therapy. It provides a comprehensive overview of selected dramatherapy approaches, anchoring them in wider knowledge of psychology, sociology and psychotherapy within international and national contexts. Giving students the opportunity to return to the chapters and, with each new read, gain a deeper understanding of the content is important. More experienced drama therapists or enthusiasts of applied forms of drama and theatre in other professions will find a thoughtful critical analysis of theory and practice and continuous comparison of approaches.

The authors' aims to reflect interdisciplinary and international aspects presented some challenges in terms of the depth of critical analysis and the transfer of terminology. While a balance of descriptive and analytical writing achieved the purpose of the publication to meet the needs of a wide range of audiences, a critical discussion of how theoretical concepts intertwine would have allowed for a richer and deeper theorization. In addition, the acknowledgement of original sources by using key terminology in English maintained consistency for readers familiar with drama therapy theory; however, the foreign language risks a loss of nuanced understanding of complex concepts due to language barriers. Considering future publications, further in-depth exploration

of key concepts might present a suitable direction for addressing regional drama therapy needs related to its positioning among other professions.

Overall, readers will thank the authors for organizing approaches, methods and techniques and providing excellent navigation through the current situation of drama therapy in practice in the Czech Republic.

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