

SOCIAL THERAPEUTICS

An introduction



WHY SOCIAL THERAPEUTICS?

We all want health, happiness, and hope through

✓ possibilities	✗ prescriptions
✓ development	✗ diagnoses
✓ connection	✗ being constrained
✓ opportunities	✗ fixed identities & labels



WHAT IS IT?

- A social and cultural approach to learning and development
- A philosophically informed, practically oriented practice-of-method
- A way of relating to people as culture creators and ensemble performers

WHAT IT IS NOT

- A biological, scientific approach
- Concerned with objectivity

WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

1970s

USA

Birth of social therapy, a form of non-diagnostic, group-oriented psychotherapy, developed by Fred Newman

Worldwide
Therapists, social workers, counselors, and coaches study and practice social therapy

Social therapeutics emerges as a recognized alternative to mainstream American psychology

Present

Social therapeutics is practiced internationally in psychology and other human sciences, education, health care, community organizing, theatre and art-based approaches to social change



HOW IS IT DIFFERENT?

- Relates to people as who they are and who they are becoming
- Centers play, performance, and practical philosophy
- Centers groups, collectives, and communities as the site and means of development
- Development is seen as something people create throughout the lifespan, rather than something that happens to them only during childhood



- People's learning and development is inextricably linked with the collective, creative process of building community
- This kind of community is defined by those who create it, rather than being defined from the outside and by others



Basic tenets



PEOPLE ARE SOCIAL BEINGS

Traditional psychology

Humans are often viewed as self-contained, isolated individuals

Social therapeutics

Humans are viewed *in relation* and as part of something larger than ourselves.

We and the world we live in are **emergent complex always transforming**

PEOPLE ARE IMPROVISERS

We all improvise some of the time by:

being spontaneous
dealing with the unexpected
breaking with a script
not following the rules

Improvising together involves working with one another to create a performance. It requires listening with an openness that tends to be rare in other situations. We are listening to create, not to evaluate or negate. We receive whatever our fellow performers have offered us and run with it.

Social therapeutics helps people perform improvisationally and work creatively with everyone and everything available in all the scenes of our lives.



PEOPLE ARE PERFORMERS

- In theatre, there is an ensemble that performs together. In life, we create things together in groups, teams, and communities.
- In social therapeutics, life is a series of stages on which we perform together.
- Some of our performances are scripted, others are improvised.
- Performing involves being who you are and being someone "other" than who you are at the same time.
- Pretending, playing, and performing with others sets the stage for us to develop.
- Unlike psychoanalytic, group dynamic, and psychodynamic approaches, social therapeutics emphasizes the ensemble activity of creating the performance.

PEOPLE ARE REVOLUTIONARIES

Humans are determined by existing circumstances ("what is")

A Humans have the capacity to transform their circumstances **N** into something new **D** ("what is becoming")

Marx and Vygotsky referred to this as revolutionary activity.

Social therapeutics is informed by this dialectical theory of change and relates to people as creators and transformers of their lives.



TERMINOLOGY

In studying social therapeutics, you will encounter some new terms. You will also encounter words you are familiar with that have different meanings in social therapeutics than ones you might be familiar with. Here are some of the most common.

RELATIONAL

Everything exists in relation to other things. We come to "know" ourselves and become who we are through others.

Relationality refers to our connectedness and the collaborative nature of human activity.



It is through our relationality that we grow, learn, and get things done.

ACTIVITY

Activity is revolutionary because it is the changing of historical totalities. It is the transformation of what exists and what determines us *by us*, which simultaneously transforms us.



Activity gives expression to relationality, to the connectedness of everything.

Activity as an ontological unit for understanding human beings



DEVELOPMENT

✓ something humans create
✗ something that happens to us

✓ socially accomplished
✗ an individual, internal process

✓ a qualitative process
✗ a linear process

✓ lifelong
✗ limited to childhood

Qualitative social change requires the emergent and continuous activity of everyone developing, in environments that support the activity of developing.

PERFORMANCE

Performance is a new ontology, a way of understanding what human beings do. It is distinct from behavior, doing, and acting.

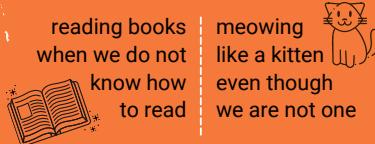
Continuously creating new performances is how we organize the relationship between who we are/ who we are becoming

something we are always doing & something we can choose to do

PLAY

Play is essential for learning and growing at any age.

Developmental play involves doing what we don't yet know how to do and being things we are not.



Play is *what* people are doing as well as *how* they are doing what they are doing.

IMPROVISATION

Improv vs. improvisation

Learning the skills of improv comedy helps people build an ensemble and have a sense of ensemble (building).

Improv gets people creating conversation in new and different ways:

- ✓ not concerned with truth
- ✓ is other-directed/has an audience
- ✓ goes some place unexpected

The improvisational nature of social therapeutics lies in supporting people to *create with what's been said*.