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It was the early summer of 1983 when attendance on a two-week British Council Specialist Course for teacher trainers brought me into contact with the work of Bernard and Marie Dufeu. I was spellbound for a day as I watched people learning French in a way I had never even dreamed of. There were masks and people moving together, breathing in rhythm, mirroring each other. There was the echoing of voices, repeating snatches of language and there was nothing I had ever seen before in a language class.

It is hard to bring across the power and magic of the Dufeus' work without showing it, without letting people participate in it, but in the following article, written by Bernard Dufeu, and kindly translated by Mario Rinvoluceri, I hope a glimpse, a scent, of the depth of the Dufeu work, at training level this time, will come across to you too. If you have not previously come across the terms or ideas of "mirroring" and "doubling" you may like to read either

Blatner, H.A. (1973) Practical Applications of Psychodramatic Methods
or Leveton, E. (1977) Psychodrama for the Timid Clinician (both by Springer Pubs.).

Britta and Rolf or the Unfaithful Mirror

by *Bernard Dufeu*
University of Mainz, West Germany

Outline

I open this article with an example drawn from a training session with language teachers, and go on from there to try and show the relationship between what a teacher in the session experienced in a mirroring exercise and some of the roots of this experience in her life. Britta, the teacher in question, in her teacher role, was moved and disappointed that, Rolf, a student, had not fulfilled her expectations in his role as student. It becomes clear that Britta's demands on him and her attitude stem from her personal life.

The problem faced by Britta links in with the expectations and demands of many teachers. The example of Britta leads me to question the bearing of exercises used in language classes and to stress the importance of personal development as the foundation for methodological and technical training.

"Britta" and "Rolf" are, by the way, fictitious names for real people.

The Training Session – The Mirroring Exercise

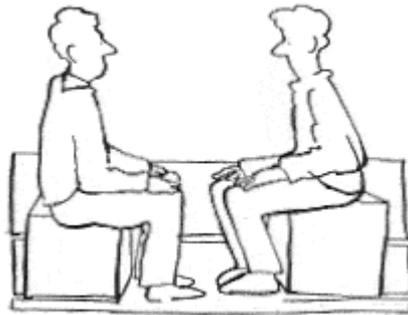
It is the second week-end of a training programme for teachers who want to use the psychodramaturgic approach to languages. Teachers of English, French, Italian and German are at work in sub-groups on a mirroring exercise.

This is the way the exercise goes: the animator/teacher focuses inwards on herself; she is wearing a blind (eyeless) half-mask over her face and this helps her concentration and withdrawal into herself. A group member is sitting opposite her; he takes on the same posture as her so as to try, at least physically, to tune in to her rhythm. This may help him to listen more deeply to what she is going to say. The teacher/animator starts putting into words the things that come into her head in this situation. She then repeats the initially spontaneous text to herself to grasp its shape. When she speaks it through for the third time, the student echoes the text after her.

Work on the text continues with the two people swapping places; the student takes the teacher's place and vice versa. He goes on echoing her text but this time tries to enter into her body language and gestures so as to feel the speech she is offering him from the inside. He will then be much more ready to respond to it once he is back in his own role.

In the third phase each goes back to their original place. The teacher/animator picks up her own monologue again, this time trying to draw the student into reacting personally to what she is saying. They move into a semi-dialogue or a real one depending on the student's communication level. The teacher/animator in this phase should help the student express his own thoughts and feelings, if necessary at the expense of her original text.

In the psychodramaturgic approach this mirroring exercise takes place on the second day of an intensive course (of usually five hours per day). This exercise follows the doubling exercise which takes up the first day and which symbolically brings back to participants the fused phase lived through by the baby in the womb and in the first weeks after its birth. On the first day the teacher/animator works to the rhythm of the student, while on the second day we ask the student to try and listen to the animator and what she has to say, and to enter as fully as he can into the monologue which she runs through several times. He attempts to 'grasp' what she is expressing by entering into her speech before reacting as best he can.



The mirroring exercise allows the group member to move symbolically from a symbiotic relationship to a differentiated one. In this exercise the group member should begin to find his own voice and his way in the foreign language. So the animator/teacher should serve the student's speech with her knowledge of the language and her expressive ability. Just as in the doubling exercise, she should be aware of the differences between her production and what the student echoes and be aware of the rhythmic and methodological variations that the student consciously or otherwise introduces, as well as of significant omissions. Her speech should be a springboard for the student.

The mirroring exercise is the crucial moment in becoming aware of the difference between the other and self: the student goes from speech based on "we" or the fused "I" to speech in the personalised "I" and "you". It is therefore vital that the student's desire for expression should be satisfied in the exercise.

Discussion After the Exercise

Let's go back to our training group. Once the exercise is over, the group say how they felt. Britta has just worked in role as a teacher/animator with Rolf as student/protagonist. She is very disappointed at what has happened. She is in a state of high emotion and expresses her disappointment in a depressive voice. It becomes clear that Rolf did little with what she offered him (and wanted to force on him, if the disappointment she expresses is a reliable guide to her feelings). She adds "I felt distanced from myself". As she speaks she is half stretched out on the carpet and says she has fierce back pains. (Classes in psychodramaturgy take place on the floor).

As she goes deeper into her thoughts she remembers that when she was a little girl she fell down, with a pot of jam in her hands. She hurt herself badly. Though she was hurt, she proudly handed her mother the pot of jam. It was still in one piece! (She was able to give back in one piece what she had to transmit. It could be that she had already learnt that it is better to suffer than to fail in her duty).

The memory of her relationship with her mother sharpens. Given the degree of her personal involvement in what she is saying and the way the group is listening actively (which makes me think she has put her finger on a problem that concerns many people present) I ask her if she wants to try to get a better understanding of what is going on inside her. She agrees. So I invite her to look for some one who could act the part of her mother. She looks round the group and then her eye falls on a dark coloured mask which is hanging on the wall. (This mask was made by Marie co-animator of the group and here, the group's symbolic mother).

She takes the mask and hangs it from the knob of one of the two doors. After a dialogue with her mother, including role reversals, it becomes clear that the mother exerts strong emotional pressure on Britta: she gets her to come and see her frequently and to listen to her in recognition (in the deep meaning of the term) of everything the mother has done for her. Britta is trying, but with strong feelings of remorse, to distance herself from her mother and not be sucked into a fused relationship. She wants to space out her visits so as to be able to live her own life despite the emotional blackmail that demands recognition and which weighs her down.

It is obvious that there is a close fit between the symbolic function of the previous mirroring exercise and the personal problems it brings up in Britta. She becomes aware that she has interiorised her mother's requirement that she listen and her mother's need to fuse with her: and in turn she expects Rolf to listen to her and to make her speech his. She requires from Rolf, what her mother requires from her. Probably she demands the same from her normal students. By trying to hold Rolf in a fused relationship, which at one and the same time offers security and alienation, she puts her own freedom as animator at risk.

She also uses the session to express the conflict between what she wants to be – the good animator who gives without requiring anything in return (the good mother, by analogy with the symbolic function she fulfils in this phase of the mirroring) – and the maternal fusional needs that she has interiorised and which she does not accept as her own. She is confronted by Rolf mirroring her attitudes, a mirror that throws back an image different from the one she would like to have and to give of herself.

In a more classical training situation Britta would have gone home feeling that the lesson had not worked, and it certainly didn't work the way she hoped. On the other hand it was just right for Rolf.

Had the exercise felt successful to Britta it would have failed for Rolf, because he would then have fitted in with her expectations; to please her he would have fused with her and would have lost himself in a text which did not rhyme with his needs. He would have alienated himself in speech which was personally foreign to him. He would have been a 'gifted' child in the sense given to the term by Alice Miller: (Alice Miller [The Drama of Being a Child](#)), that is to say, a child who fits in with the desires and expectations of his parents to the detriment of his own needs and desires and to the point where he can no longer feel these needs.)

It is Rolf's desire to express himself and not to express her that gives rise to the necessary separateness and which allows each person to be themselves just where and as they are. A real dialogue can only be born from this separateness.

Such a dialogue will only come about if each person internally listens to the other, not only to what is actually said but to what the other is trying to express. This is why the second day in a psychodramaturgy course offers the students – and the animator/teachers – training in listening to the other, and to the self differentiated from the other.

It is no accident that Britta should have come across this problem in a mirroring exercise since the exercise symbolises what is often a hidden, underlying agenda in teaching; moulding the other in one's own image. The exercise throws light on the desire, which is not necessarily conscious, that the other should respond to and correspond with what I, the teacher, expect from him. He reflects my desire to breathe into him my knowledge, my way of feeling things, my mode of thought, my convictions and my needs and desires as well.

In this echoing, mirroring game one wants to achieve recognition of self in the other and a resonance in the other. (There are good reasons for Narcissus meeting Echo in Greek mythology.) This is also the myth of the original creator, of the solitary God who shapes the other in his image.

Teaching as Gentle Violence

It is with varying degrees of gentle violence that, as a teacher, I impose not just my method, my progression, my rhythm, my contents, my style of relating to others, my way of thinking about language and communication, but my way of being and becoming as well.

These expectations of the other often go beyond what I am as a teacher. They include what I would like to be: the student must not just correspond to what I think I am, to the idealised image I have of myself (good at the language I teach, flexible, creative, witty.....), he must also correspond with what I would like to be. The other becomes an idealised construct; I make him carry my hopes of going beyond myself (like Pygmalion, who, refusing reality, sculpts his ideal complement, falls in love with the statue and expects it to come to life), and at the same time I fear that all this can really happen. (c.f. the teacher's desire and fear that his students will go further than him).

My disappointment as a teacher is, in part, cut to the cloth of my illusions. Because I too often identify with what I want to get across ('I am the subject I teach') and the way I get it across ('I am my teaching'), I find it hard to accept that my message should be transformed or deformed, because then the students are transforming or deforming me, not just what I say. My disappointment, parallel to Britta's, rests on a confusion between doing and being, a confusion that reduces the individual to his acts, exactly like a child who is not loved for 'who' he is but for what he does. So Britta does not see Rolf facing her but sees instead the author statements he has deformed, transformed or silenced,,,,,,,,,

The disappointment expressed by Britta reflects the difficulty of any teacher in reaching a harsh understanding of her limits and of her basic powerlessness. Rolf makes Britta cruelly aware of the sundering felt by any teacher at the crossroads of her demands. He makes her aware not only of her demands for perfection but also of her limits. He makes it clear to her that her statements do not move him so deeply as to draw him ineluctably into repeating them.

He makes her realise that she is not the profoundly empathetic, sensitive animator that she would like to be, certainly not sufficiently so to reach him in speech that he will make irresistibly his own. He establishes the limits of her power of seduction: she was unable to find the words that would please him and to draw him into her voice. He does not give in to the desire for narcissistic fusion that she tries to share with him, he is not the happy echo of her text. She cannot see herself in what she wants to teach him. He makes her realise that there will always be a deformation in the look and words of the other and that this deformation is the necessary condition for recognition of the other as other. The deformation is a reflection of the difference which allows them each to stay themselves. He will only be able to get on the same wave length as her if she agrees to be herself and nothing but herself – she must give up attempting to obtain a fused relationship.

I have here summarised some of the essential things that came up during Britta's meeting with herself and her past, via her meeting with Rolf, as it seems to me that what happened here to Britta is what happens to each of us more or less obviously and perceptibly in our teaching life.

Questions about language classroom activities

Britta's example leads me to ask a number of questions about the activities done in language classes:

- What kind of relationships are implied by the activity I decide on at a manifest and at a latent level (insofar as I can perceive the latter)?
- What type of involvement does the activity require?
- What is the activity's symbolism? This is not always as clear as in the doubling and mirroring exercises, and even here we are only beginning to decode some of the symbolism.
- What are my pedagogical aims, both the declared and the underlying ones?
- What is my training construct? This begs the question of my concept of human beings and their becoming within a pedagogical frame and beyond it.
- Are my ways of doing and of being in harmony? Suppose I am authoritarian by temperament and I use an 'open' exercise which does not fit my relational structures and my deep understanding of my teacher role. How is this contradiction expressed in the running of the exercise? Do my attitudes short-circuit the activity? Here we see the importance of working towards not only a knowledge of the ideal of self) what I would like to be as a teacher, and what I am aware of not being) but also a knowledge of the ideal self (what I believe I am),

which can lead to a sometimes unhappy awareness of the gap between the image I have of myself and what I really am.

Conclusions

In a pedagogy which is not simply one of action but also takes relationships into account, teacher training cannot simply put across a methodology or offer techniques that will strengthen the pedagogical power of the teacher. The training must also sensitise the teacher to her own attitudes, behaviour, projections, transference, ways of relating to others, fears, anxieties and expectations. All these factors influence her methodological understanding and the use she may make of the techniques suggested. Of much greater importance, though, is the deep impact they have on the person of the student and therefore on the act of learning.

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Bernard Dufeu was born in 1941, teaches French at the University of Mainz and is also a psychodramatist. Since 1977 he has been developing "psychodramaturgy". It connects psychodrama, dramaturgy and pedagogy. He is also a teacher trainer and focuses his work in aspects of teacher development and on the relationship between teacher and students.

