

SOCIODRAMA

by Sally Bailey, MFA, MSW, RDT/BCT- Kansas State Univ.; sdbailey@ksu.edu
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WHY USE SOCIODRAMA?

Sociodrama (also called Role Play) is an excellent vehicle for teaching social skills because it is a concrete, hands-on, interactive modality. Role playing social situation offers participants the opportunity to practice social skills, problem-solving, decision-making, and ways to express themselves appropriately in a safe environment. Sociodrama is safe because it is pretend and nothing “real” is at stake. When you teach social skills, you are teaching appropriate behaviors. Drama, by its very nature is behavior.

ASPECTS OF SOCIODRAMA

Sociodrama offers participants the opportunity to explore all the appropriate and inappropriate behavior choices in a situation and the resulting consequences of those actions.

AN OPEN, NON-JUDGMENTAL APPROACH. Instead of being shamed or embarrassed about an inappropriate or unwise choice, as they might be in real life, participants in a sociodrama role play can examine choices in a non-judgmental, distanced way.

The most successful approach to role playing takes the attitude of “There is no right or wrong in this situation. There are hundreds of different choices that could be made. Some choices are better than others or safer than others, so let’s look at a number of choices and their consequences and see which one or ones would be more effective or more appropriate or safer.”

REHEARSAL. Often we need to rehearse a skill many times before it becomes part of our skill repertory and available for use. In drama a scene or situation can be rehearsed as often as is necessary – either with the same participants trying out the situation again or others in the group taking a turn at the same situation. This reinforces the lesson by participating and observing others trying out the same behavior.

REPLAY. If participants make a mistake, it is very easy to “replay” the dramatic situation and correct it or to try different alternative solutions – all of which might be appropriate. The ability to “replay” which is inherent in drama helps develop flexibility in participants who have rigid approaches to life. It also allows participants to play different roles and see a situation from another person’s point of view or from several different points of view.

DISTANCE. Role playing can be approached sociodramatically or psychodramatically. In *sociodramatic role play* (which is what we are discussing in this article) the participants pretend to be a character other than themselves. In *psychodramatic role play*, they play themselves in a given, real life situation. Sociodramatic role play enhances distance and avoids putting participants on the spot. Psychodramatic role play enhances proximity and needs less generalization to be used in real life situations.

Often a **sociodramatic approach** will enhance learning more than a psychodramatic one. It's hard for us to look at ourselves critically, especially in front of other people. It's easier to look critically at someone else (i.e., the fictional character one is portraying). Participants who feel ashamed or "in the wrong" about being caught doing appropriate behavior may shut down and not be able to talk about it or look at it objectively. However, if the participants are pretending to be someone different from him or herself, they can avoid feeling ashamed and gain insight and perspective on the behavior in question. The sociodramatic approach allows the participants to be more playful and spontaneous because they feel less judged.

On the other hand, a **psychodramatic approach** can be useful to personalize information. It allows the participant to feel the situation/behavior/emotions more deeply. As the facilitator you will need to decide which approach to use.

MULTIPLE LEARNING CHANNELS Since drama involves the participant physically, mentally, and emotionally in the process, the information learned is experienced in a very immediate, concrete, embodied way. It means more to the participant than if it were presented in a lecture format only. In addition to using auditory learning channels, drama employs the visual and kinesthetic learning channels, which may be stronger in alternative learners. Drama also has the added advantage of providing information through all three learning channels simultaneously, reinforcing what is learned as it is learned!

BASICS OF SOCIODRAMATIC ROLE PLAYING

1. SELECT A SITUATION.

Each situation needs to have a conflict in it or a problem that needs to be solved.

Example: A guy calls a girl up for a first date. Will she say "Yes!" or "No!"

2. CASTING THE SCENE. Ask for volunteers to act out the situation.

3. ESTABLISH THE ROLES or characters each actor is playing.

– Talk about what each character needs to do in the scene.

– Decide on certain specific details to help make the role a fictional one:

i.e., name, age, job, feelings toward the situation at the beginning of the scene.

– Decide what the basic relationship between the characters will be:

i.e., friendly, angry, don't know each other.

Example: "Bob" is going to call "Cindy" on the phone to ask her out on a date. "Bob" is about 23, lives in a group home, is shy and nervous about calling. "Cindy" is 22, lives at home with her parents, doesn't have a boyfriend, met "Bob" at work, but doesn't know him well. They both work in the same restaurant. "Bob" is a dishwasher and "Cindy" buses tables.

You don't need too many details, but you need enough to "set the stage" for the role playing to develop.

4. SET UP THE SCENE. Decide where the actors are going to be physically in the room and the scene. Set up the space with chairs, tables, props, if needed.

Example: “Bob” is sitting in a chair on the left with a phone beside him and “Cindy” is sitting on the right with a phone beside her. Both are facing away from each other, so they can’t see each others’ faces.

5. **STARTING THE SCENE.** The group leader starts the action by saying “Action,” “Curtain,” or another agreed upon “Go” signal and the actors begin playing their roles.
6. **SIDECOACHING.** If the actors get stuck or go off on a tangent, the group leader can stop the action and **sidecoach**.
Sidecoaching can take the form of:
 - suggesting things to do or say
 - asking the actor to step “out of role” and brainstorm for him/herself things to do or say.
 - asking for suggestions from the audience.When you need to sidecoach **FREEZE** the action by saying “Freeze,” “Pause,” or “Time Out.” Sidecoach. Then re-activate the scene by saying “Unfreeze,” “Go Ahead,” “Continue,” or “Action.”
7. **END THE SCENE.** When the problem or conflict is solved, the scene is done.
If the actors don’t find a natural end to their scene, the group leader can step in and end it by saying “Curtain” or by saying “Find a way to end the scene.”
8. **GROUP DISCUSSION.** (Also called **SHARING** or **DE-ROLING**)
When the scene is done, the group leader leads a discussion about what happened.
 - A. ALWAYS DISCUSS THE POSITIVE THINGS that the actors/characters did FIRST!
They have given a gift to the group by stepping forward and taking a risk to role play for the group. They need to be acknowledged for that!
 - B. After you talk about what worked, talk about alternative solutions to the problem that the character might have tried and what the consequences of those actions might have been (better or worse) by asking “What else might they have done?”

The Group Discussion is very important so that actors can de-role (take off or get out of the role they have been playing) and get back to themselves. The audience also needs to de-role as often members watching will empathize and identify with one or several roles and take on the role imaginatively and emotionally.
9. **REPLAYING** After the discussion the actors might want to try:
 - acting out the situation using the alternative solutions that the group offered.
 - switching roles and trying out the situation from the other character’s point of view.
 - another set of actors might want to try to act out the situation.