
DRAMA: LOOKING INTO AN ISSUE

Using drama approaches

Role play

Participants take on the roles in the cards. There is no audience and they do not have to “act.” The group improvise the situation, and ideas about how it might be resolved. Action can be stopped by the facilitator at any time to discuss problems or move the improvisation on.

When might you use activities like these?

Writing in role

Participants create a document from the perspective of the people in the role cards [eg a diary, letter, newspaper article, a statement to court]. They may need to research this further first. [Children’s understanding of, and investment in, writing in role is increased considerably if it happens during or after drama work].

Role on the wall

A simple outline is drawn on the board for each person in the role card. In the space around the outline participants put all the things they know about them [where they live, what they do etc]. They can also put questions that they want to know, or things that they are not sure about [eg about their family background].

In the space within the outline they put words to describe how the person may be feeling [eg about the other’s use of the waterhole]. They can also put words which describe the person’s personality [eg hardworking, thoughtful].

Teacher in role

The facilitator participates in the role play situation, providing information and guiding the narrative. This offers a focus for participants’ questions and reasoned arguments, while ‘equalising’ the facilitator with the participant. It may, for example, allow her to take on the role of a government official insisting that an agreement is reached between the two parties, or of a third party also wishing to make use of the land and waterhole.

The facilitator explains that she is going to pretend to be someone else. To ‘sign’ the role, she makes it clear that she is in role when [for example] she wears an item of clothing [hat, shawl], carries a prop [clipboard], or is standing/sitting. When she wants to finish working in role, she removes the item and tells the children she is the facilitator again. She does not need acting skills for this, but may want to use body language to give clues about the person she is portraying.

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Hot seating

Following some research, the facilitator – in role as one of the people on the cards - answers questions prepared by participants. Other people with sufficient knowledge and confidence might also take the hot seat. Hot seating is useful for sharing information and developing questioning skills.

How might you adapt these activities?

Freeze frame

A three dimensional picture uses body language, facial expressions and space to create meaning. It can be used within a role play to stop the action at a key point for questioning and investigation. Photographs can provide a useful starting point for a freeze frame. Through creating a freeze frame, participants begin to question what is taking place in the image, why it was created – and by whom.

This could be extended into “still theatre” where a series of freeze frames tells a simple story [eg about how the land use conflict arose and how it was resolved].

Characters in a freeze frame can also be “thought tracked”, where –on a cue - they [or a spectator, on their behalf] say aloud what they might be thinking or feeling at that moment. Thoughts should be made in the first person “I.”

The whole group could be asked to produce a “soundscape” for a freeze frame or improvisation [eg the cattle and voices at the river, creating a sense of bustle].

Conscience alley

The group make two lines facing each other, in the form of an alley or corridor, with enough room for a person to walk easily between them. A person takes on the role of one of the people from the role cards, in a key situation. The rest of the group then voice the characters’ thoughts and feelings as s/he walks past them. It is helpful to do the exercise more than once, as this gives less confident participants the chance to think of something to say.

Adapted from *Rehearsing our roles*