

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AN INSERVICE TRAINING PROGRAM IN ROLE PLAYING ON ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM TEACHERS

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The purpose of this paper is to evaluate whether an inservice training program in role playing which included a workshop and weekly consultation periods is an effective training model for helping teachers gain a better knowledge and understanding of the role playing technique and for promoting a more "skillful" use of role playing in the classroom. As the literature suggests, role playing and sociodrama (Moreno, 1946) offer numerous advantages and benefits for the field of education, in general, and more specifically for the elementary and secondary classroom teacher. As Stanford and Roark (1974) (see, also, Roark & Stanford, 1975) noted, role playing and action methods can make the following important contributions to students' development; through role playing, students are helped to develop self-understanding and awareness of their own feelings, to release feelings safely, to develop empathy for and insight into other people, to try out new behavior and experiment with new roles, to learn and practice new social skills, and to develop skills of group problem solving, to improve psychomotor skills, to foster creativity and imagination, and to enhance subject matter learning. Similar lists of advantages of role playing in the classroom can be found in a number of useful sources on role playing, such as Chesler and Fox (1966), Dinkmeyer (1970, 1973), Dreikurs, Grunwald, and Pepper (1971), Furness (1976), Grambs (1968), Hawley (1975), Klein (1956), and Shaftel and Shaftel (1967).

More recently, several authors strongly suggested the appropriateness of the role playing technique in the classroom. They noticed the students' growing discontent with their passive role in the learning process and their rejection of the traditional methods of classroom learning in which the major portion of the classroom activity has been centered around the teacher (Champagne & Hines, 1971; Hawley, 1975; Hopkins, 1970; Michels & Hatcher, 1972; Stanford, 1974). As Michels and Hatcher (1972) pointed out, "sociodrama can fill an important role and serve the useful

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purpose of helping to solve current educational problems and promote educational objectives" (pp. 151-152).

Shaftel and Shaftel (1967), in their comprehensive text on role playing, reviewed numerous studies and reports which seem to suggest that role playing is used by teachers in the classroom, especially in the teaching of social studies. A review of the more recent literature also points in that direction. Teachers use role playing for many different purposes, such as for teaching subject matter, i.e., social studies (Appleberry & Field, 1974), history (Dumas, 1970) and chemistry (Plati, 1970), in courses such as family living and drama (Mekeel, 1970) and as a major methodology in courses in humanities (Strauss & Dufour, 1970). Role playing is also used by teachers for dealing with behavior problems, tensions and conflicts in the classroom (Blake, 1974; Crystal, 1969; Furness, 1977; Stanford & Stanford, 1974) and for teaching interpersonal relationship skills (Harlan, 1970; Lear, 1970).

However, with all the advantages that the role playing methodology has for the classroom teacher and the empirical evidence of its use, it is suggested that role playing is not that widely used by teachers (Chesler & Fox, 1966; Grambs, 1968; Hawley, 1975; Riessman, 1964; Roark & Stanford, 1975).

Several authors noted that the major reason for that infrequent use is a lack of real knowledge and understanding of the role playing methodology by classroom teachers (Chesler & Fox, 1966; Dinkmeyer, 1973; Hawley, 1975; Roark & Stanford, 1975).

Grambs (1968) felt that role playing requires a teacher who is sensitive to the feelings of the group and is able to accept any direction it may take. The teacher must also be comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty (which many are not).

Hawley (1975) added that teachers may avoid role playing because they do not want to waste precious class time in "playing" when they could have used it on having a serious discussion. He also noted that some teachers may fear the possibilities of unleashing emotional forces by their students which they feel inadequate to deal with.

Some authors pointed out that teachers may even be resistant to the use of role playing for fear that one might "accuse" them of trying to introduce mental health materials or programs into schools (Chesler & Fox, 1966; Grambs, 1968; Riesman, 1964).

According to Stanford (1974), teachers have not discovered the exciting potential of role playing because they probably have never seen role playing work really well, or they have tried it and failed miserably in their early attempts. Her analysis of teachers' performance during role playing led her to conclude that there are six major problems that teachers face

when they attempt to use role playing in the classroom. These problems include (a) students who are not well acquainted and comfortable with one another, (b) inhibitions and self-consciousness of students about moving and touching which is especially true for the older students at the junior high, (c) students' lack of necessary skills, (d) students who have not properly warmed up before the role playing activities, (e) passivity of the classroom teacher, and (f) the tendency to expect role playing to be entertaining rather than a serious learning endeavor.

As Stanford pointed out, these problems can be overcome through proper training and preparation of teachers, a view that is obviously shared by those authors who address their textbooks on role playing to an audience of teachers (i.e., Chesler & Fox, 1966; Furness, 1976; Hawley, 1975; Shaftel & Shaftel, 1967 and others).

However, it should also be noted that there is very little empirical evidence to demonstrate that training of teachers in role playing is effective in overcoming the kind of problems and difficulties they have in using this strategy.

It is the purpose of this paper to evaluate whether an inservice training program in role playing offered to elementary classroom teachers is useful in producing a better knowledge and understanding of that technique and in building the basic skills necessary for directing successful role playing sessions in the classroom.

The paper is based on a larger study which attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of a role playing intervention on students' behavior and attitudes. That study included an inservice teacher training program as one of its major components. Only that component will be evaluated in the present report.

Procedure

Several months before the study was conducted, this researcher was involved in the development of instructional materials for training teachers in role playing. The materials included a teacher training manual titled "Role playing as a Method for Teaching Social Skills".* The manual included a detailed explanation of a variety of role playing activities and techniques and an outline of suggested steps to be taken during the implementation of a role playing session. Several major publications on role playing (Chesler & Fox, 1966; Dinkmeyer, 1970, 1973; Grambs, 1968; Klein, 1956; Corsini & Cardone, 1966; Lehman, 1971; Lippitt, 1958;

* The manual was duplicated in a limited number of copies and used only for purposes of this study.

Lippitt & Hubbell, 1956; Maier, 1952; Moreno, 1946) were used in the preparation of the manual. Included in the manual were 32 unfinished problem stories that were adapted mainly from Chesler and Fox (1966), Dinkmeyer (1970, 1973), and Shaftel and Shaftel (1967). Also prepared were name tags, pictures and short briefings to the actors. The materials were packaged in folders and later distributed to the participating teachers.

Following the stage of material development and of their piloting in several classrooms, the main project began. This project was conducted in grades three through five in 65 classrooms in two school districts in a midwestern state. Half of the classrooms were randomly assigned to the experimental condition and half to the control condition, making a total of 32 experimental classrooms and 33 control classrooms. All 31** experimental teachers were then involved in a role playing training program which included a workshop and consultation sessions. The workshop lasted two hours and was given to teachers who met in groups of six to 10, after school hours. The major purposes of that workshop were: (a) to train the teachers in a variety of methods and techniques of role playing, (b) to help teachers through demonstrations and group discussions to overcome any fears and reluctance of using role playing with their students, and (c) to familiarize them with the manual, the stories and the materials. Much emphasis was given on teacher involvement through active participation.

After the workshop which was only the first step in the teacher training, the researcher met with the teachers on a weekly or bi-weekly basis for about 15–20 minutes each during the 10 weeks of the program. These meetings took place during recess, lunch, or after school hours. Their purpose was (a) to answer teacher's questions and solve problems which they encountered during the role playing sessions, (b) to use it as an opportunity to fill in missing links in the knowledge and understanding of role playing and its techniques, and (c) to find out whether teachers implemented the role playing sessions as directed.

The role playing project lasted 10 weeks. During that period, the 31 experimental teachers were directed to implement two weekly role playing sessions of about 30–40 minutes each in their classrooms. No training in role playing was given to the control teachers nor did they receive any materials. They also were not instructed to use role playing with their students. In order to evaluate the performance of the experimental teachers during the 10 weeks of the program (some information on teachers' performance was secured during the consultation periods), each teacher was asked to fill out a Lesson Activities and Evaluation form.

**One teacher was in charge of two classrooms.

This form was divided into two parts. In Part A, the teachers checked the steps and activities they followed during that particular session as well as the story used. In the second part, they evaluated their students' involvement, interest, social relationships, and type of solutions to the problems. One additional purpose of this form was that it served as a guide for the teachers during the role playing sessions (reminding them of the steps and activities that can be applied). Further information about the teachers' attitudes toward role playing and the program were secured through a questionnaire administered at the end of the project.

Results

In this section, findings related to the teacher's performance and their attitudes toward role playing will be presented in order to evaluate the usefulness of the teacher training component of the project.

A. Classroom implementation

Table 1 shows the percent and number of teachers who used the different role playing steps and the percent and number of sessions in which these steps were followed. As can be seen, all teachers reported that they followed in many of the sessions the basic steps that were outlined to them in the workshop, the manual and the consultation sessions. Steps which were followed during most or all of the sessions included: explaining the role playing situation (setting the scene), explaining the audience role, the dramatic enactment and discussion. Other steps were not always followed. For example, warm-ups were used mostly during the early part of the program and were skipped during the later sessions. The steps of "presentation of the problem" and "explaining participant roles" were used whenever the teacher used a problem story. However, when a pantomime was used, there was no need for these two steps. Reenactment was used quite infrequently. Also, only 75% of the teachers "found" time to summarize the session.

B. Use of special techniques

Table 2 shows the percent and the number of teachers and the mean percent and number of sessions in which teachers used the various role playing techniques in which they were trained. The average number of techniques used was 4.36 (SD = 1.26), i.e., most teachers tried between three and six special techniques during the program. However, figures also reveal that several techniques were more widely implemented than others. For example, the most preferred formats were the consultant and

Table 1

Percent and Number of Teachers Who Used Each Step and Percent and Number of Sessions (Means) in Which Steps Were Implemented (Data for Combined Districts)*

Step or Activity	Percent Teachers	No. Teachers	Percent of Sessions	Number of Sessions
Steps				
1. Warm-ups	100	31	49.6	6.96
2. Presentation of the Problem Story	100	31	54.4	7.64
3. Explanation of the Situation	100	31	75.4	10.58
4. Explaining Participant Roles	100	31	60.9	8.56
5. Explaining Audience Roles			(84.8)	(12.00)
a. Audience Acted as Consultants	87.1	27	28.9	4.00
b. Audience listened and/or took notes	100	31	55.9	8.00
6. Dramatic Enactment			(108.5)**	(15.35)
a. Pantomime	100	31	42.0	5.90
b. Role Play story ending	100	31	43.7	6.12
c. Acting from Seat	25.8	8	11.0	1.63
d. Alternative-Writing Ending of Story	74.1	23	11.8	1.70
7. Discussion			(102.5)***	(14.29)
a. Large group	100	31	73.3	10.29
b. Small group	87.1	27	21.4	3.0
c. Dyads	25.8	8	7.8	1.0
8. Reenactment	61.2	19	18.5	2.57
9. Summary	74.2	23	56.0	9.04

* Mean number of role playing sessions for all 31 teachers = 14.03. SD = 3.02.

** More than 100%, as some teachers used more than one activity per session.

*** More than 100%, as some teachers used more than one type of discussion per session.

multiple enactments. Next were the role reversal and multiple role players. The less popular techniques were the soliloquy, the doubling the new role and the auxiliary chair, all were tried by only about one-third of the teachers, and implemented on the average of 1.5 sessions during the program.

C. Teachers' reception of the program

At the end of the project, each of the participating teachers filled out a questionnaire in which he/she were asked to evaluate the program. Table 3 presents the responses to several key questions in that questionnaire. The figures presented in this table suggest that the teachers were very positive about the program. The majority of them indicated that they

Table 2

Percent and Number of Teachers Using Special Techniques and Percent and Number (Means) of Sessions in Which Techniques Were Used
(Mean Number of Techniques 4.36 SD = 1.26)

Techniques	Percent Teachers	No. Teachers	Percent of Sessions	No. Sessions
1. Role Reversal ¹	58.4	18	14.8	2.22
2. Soliloquy Technique ²	32.2	10	9.6	1.30
3. Doubling Technique ³	29.0	9	10.4	1.55
4. The Consultant ⁴	87.0	27	20.9	3.00
5. Multiple Role Players ⁵	67.7	21	23.1	3.19
6. Multiple Enactment ⁶	83.3	26	19.1	2.73
7. The New Role ⁷	35.4	11	17.6	2.45
8. Auxiliary Chair ⁸	41.9	13	9.6	1.38

¹ Role Reversal—a technique in which role players exchange their roles to get a better understanding of the other point of view.

² The Soliloquy—a technique in which the player turns to the audience and states openly what he is thinking or feeling but is not saying or expressing in the dialogue.

³ Double Technique—a volunteer acts as the player's double expressing the ideas and feelings that he imagines the character has but is not expressing openly.

⁴ The Consultant—a group member is assigned as a consultant to the actor helping him with his role.

⁵ Multiple Role Players—two or three children play a character together and help each other in the enactment and in working out a solution to the problem.

⁶ Multiple Enactment—the scene is enacted again with different players.

⁷ The New Role—the teacher is encouraged to step in the scene with a new invented role (father, teacher, sister, etc.) in order to add some new insight or help to find a solution.

⁸ Auxiliary Chair—role playing done with chairs to present the various characters or behaviors to be analyzed. The director stands behind the chair to facilitate the projection of feelings, words, and thoughts into the chair.

learned and benefited much from the workshop as well as from the program which offered them the opportunity to practice the skills of directing role playing sessions. Most teachers found the manual which they used in the classroom of great help. The figures also revealed that all of the teachers plan to use role playing in the future; two-thirds plan to do so very often. Almost all teachers recognized that the role playing lessons were very motivating to their students. However, only one-fourth of the teachers noted that the program had strong effect on their students. Following are a few comments which teachers made on the questionnaire: "I had read about role playing but didn't know about setting the program up." "It was a good review of what I knew, and taught me many techniques I didn't know." "By asking for multiple solutions, non-serious answers are soon forgotten and more practical and sincere answers given." "It was encouraging to hear the interaction that had taken place in using the same stories and the different approaches used with each." "The more involved the students became, the more they could talk about

Table 3
Teacher Evaluation of the Program (Percents) N = 31

	I knew most of it before	To a certain degree	Useful Very Useful Extremely Useful
A. Was the workshop on role playing useful and helpful for you?	3.2	22.6	74.2
	Some	Quite a Lot	
B. How much have you learned and benefited from the total program?	37.9	62.1	
	Some	Of Great Help	Extremely Helpful
C. Was the manual helpful and useful	6.5	35.5	58.0
	From time to time	Quite often A lot	
D. Will you use role playing in your classroom next year?	35.5	64.5	
	Some	Quite a lot A lot	
E. How much were your students interested and involved?	9.7	90.3	
	A little	Some	Quite a lot A lot
F. How much did your students benefit from the program?	3.2	70.9	25.9

the problem. The majority of the students have trouble acting out roles.”
“I would have liked to have seen a role playing situation presented but with children.”

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to evaluate the effectiveness of an inservice teacher training program on role playing. As the review of the literature indicated, role playing is not widely used as a teaching technique in the classroom. The main reasons suggested for its infrequent use were: lack of knowledge and understanding of role playing, difficulties in implementation, and reluctance to cope with feelings or emotions in the classroom.

Findings from this study suggest that training of teachers in role playing is necessary in order to teach the necessary skills and develop a better

understanding of this methodology. Teacher responses to the questionnaire revealed that they had some training in role playing before the project, but that they were lacking basic skills of conducting role playing sessions. For most of them, the workshop and the consultation periods offered an opportunity to learn more about role playing. Furthermore, the project gave them an opportunity to practice and improve their skills under supervision (consultation periods). It should be noted that during the 10-week project, the teachers implemented on the average 14 sessions of 30–40 minutes each. The majority carried out between 11–17 sessions or 1.1 to 1.7 sessions per week. Five teachers implemented between 18–20 sessions or about two sessions per week, while only five of the whole group carried out about 10 sessions or one session on the average per week.

Based on teacher responses to the Lesson Activities form and from comments made during the consultation periods, it may be concluded that most of them understood the need of following carefully a sequence of planned steps during each session. Two of the steps were always followed, the dramatic enactment and the discussion step. The dramatic enactment included usually the acting out of a pantomime and the acting out of a problem story ending. Acting from the seat was rarely used and so was the alternative of writing an end to a problem story.

A group discussion always followed the enactment step. It is interesting that teachers used the traditional format of conducting a classroom discussion; that is, a whole group discussion. Only during few sessions did they conduct a discussion in small groups. Discussions in dyads were rarely used.

Several other steps were also frequently used. For example, teachers seemed to recognize the importance of involving the audience by assigning them some type of responsibility. In about one-fourth of the sessions, members of the audience acted as consultants. In most of the sessions, however, they were instructed to look for certain things or to take notes. While there is evidence that the teachers recognized the need to involve the audience, the importance of audience involvement needs to be much more stressed in future training programs. Teachers explained the situation (or set up the scene), especially during pantomimes and role plays in 75% of the sessions. Warm-ups were used early in the program and skipped in later sessions. The reenactment step was infrequently carried out. As several pointed out, the major seven steps took up most of the time they were ready to spend for a session and so they did not encourage additional enactments of the scene. Also, not all of the teachers recognized the importance of offering a brief summary of the major points and of the solutions suggested during the session.

The number of different role playing techniques tried out by the teachers during the 10 weeks of the program was very encouraging. On the average, teachers used 4.36 ($SD = 1.26$) different role playing techniques out of the eight presented to them in the workshop and the manual. However, it is also interesting to note that several techniques were probably easier and better received than others. The most widely used ones were the consultant, multiple enactments, role reversal, and multiple role players. Two of the techniques, the soliloquy and the doubling, may have been too complicated and sophisticated, especially for the younger students and were, therefore, used by less than one-third of the teachers on an average of 1.5 sessions during the program. It is also interesting that the techniques which required active participation of the teacher during the enactment step, i.e., the new role and the auxiliary chair, were "tried out" by only 35–40%. It seems that many teachers still did not feel free to perform in front of their students. As Weckler noted in her introduction (Furness, 1976), teachers in our educational system are not only discouraged from disclosing the basic aspects of their own humanness, but are also often discouraged from being openly emotionally expressive in the classroom. This, then, is one area where further training and encouragement are needed in order to make role playing work more effectively.

Teachers' evaluation of the program turned out to be very positive. Almost all of them pointed out that the program was an important learning experience. On the question whether they plan to use role playing in the future, all gave a positive answer. Two-thirds even stated that they plan to use role playing very often the following year.

The teacher training manual was highly appreciated by the teachers. From comments made, it may be concluded that most of them did not have books on role playing at home, nor were books on role playing available in the school library.

Findings from this study suggest that a short inservice training program which includes a workshop plus weekly brief consultation periods is an effective model for training teachers to use role playing. The inservice program was beneficial in helping teachers to gain a better knowledge and understanding of the different techniques, methods and steps required in directing role playing sessions. Their performance in the classroom proved that teachers can become effective and willing users of role playing.

As to the impact of the program on students' behavior and attitudes, it should be mentioned that the results of the statistical analyses did not turn out to be significant, although several were in the predicted direction. It is the belief of this researcher that if the intervention had lasted over several more weeks, its impact may have been more noted.

Conclusions and Suggestions

1. Findings from this study suggest that elementary classroom teachers do not have an adequate training in role playing. Furthermore, from responses given by teachers, it may be concluded that role playing sessions are rarely conducted in the classroom.

2. An inservice training program in role playing, which includes a workshop, and followed by weekly brief consultation periods, are useful in building the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills needed for directing role playing sessions in the classroom. Through this type of inservice training, some of the problems that teachers seem to have with role playing such as lack of basic knowledge, bad experience and unfavorable attitudes can be reduced.

3. It is suggested that inservice training programs in role playing be offered to teachers in several workshops during the year. Trained school psychologists and counselors should have a major responsibility in conducting these workshops. Furthermore, because psychologists and counselors are available in the school building, they would serve as consultants to teachers whenever questions or problems arise. They could also demonstrate the uses of role playing with students to the classroom teachers.

4. In light of the many advantages of role playing in education, colleges and universities involved in teacher education should include several sessions on role playing as an important component in their methods and/or classroom management courses.

5. Training programs of elementary classroom teachers should focus on the value of role playing as a teaching strategy and not on role playing as a therapeutic approach. Techniques such as doubling and the soliloquy may, therefore, not be appropriate.

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