# EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

## ROLE-PLAYING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Area(s)</th>
<th>Social/Emotional/Behavioral Supports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level(s)</td>
<td>K-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Brief Summary**

Role-playing is a teaching strategy that emphasizes the social nature of learning and stimulates students both socially and intellectually.

**Expanded Description**

Role-playing is a great way to teach students a new concept that the students may have little to no knowledge about. These strategies benefit the learning of academics, social skills, and behaviors. The role-playing approach can be used in all grade levels in schools. Role-playing in the classroom is done when the students act as though they are someone else such as a historical character or themselves in a new situation (Lori, Kathryn & Mike, 2002).

Children use role play early on in their lives when they play house, store, etc. The children are really learning and educating themselves in how to run a home, balance their money, and get along with others without even realizing it. That is how role-playing teaches children in the classroom; many students will think it is just a fun activity about a subject when in reality they are truly learning the concept of the subject. Role-playing provides a way to get all the students involved. Students who learn best kinesthetically will benefit tremendously whether they are learning academic concepts or behavioral expectations in different situation. Students who are more timid may feel more comfortable with role playing because it gets them involved with the rest of the class and doing is learning (Lori, Kathryn & Mike, 2002).

Teachers use role playing because it is efficient and easy. If they are trying to teach academics, such as history, there are scripts that can be looked up to use immediately with the students. If proper social skills in certain situations are the goal, teachers can look up scripts as well or even create their own.

Role-playing in the classroom can help students who are going through transition too. Whether a student has a disability or not, transitions can be a scary time for them. Role-playing what the students can expect in their new home, school, doctors appointment, or job will help the students feel more prepared and confident when the transition in in progress. Role-playing is meant to teach kids about a subject or social/emotional/behavior skills by having the students get physically involved to help enhancing their comprehension of what they are learning (Jarvis, Odell & Troiano, 2002).

**Essential Components/ “How to” Information**
It encourages individuals, while in role, to reflect upon their knowledge of a subject. Role-play is an excellent teaching method for reviewing material at the end of a course of study.

Individuals are required to use appropriate concepts and arguments as defined by their role. As roles change, so might relevant concepts and arguments. Students may come, as a consequence, to appreciate more fully the relevance of diverse opinions and how they are formed.

Participation helps embed concepts. The importance of creating an active learning environment is well recognized if the objective is one of depth, rather than surface learning. Role-playing can make a valuable contribution in this process.

It gives life and immediacy to academic material that can be largely descriptive and/or theoretical.

It can encourage students to empathize with the position and feelings of others. This is something that can be missed if not purposelessly embedded in the instructional (Jarvis, Odell & Troiano, 2002).

Steps

- **Identify the Situation**
  - To start the process: gather people together, introduce the problem, and encourage an open discussion to uncover all of the relevant issues. This will help people to start thinking about the problem before the role-play begins.
  - If you're in a group and people are unfamiliar with each other, consider doing some icebreaker exercises beforehand.

- **Set the Stage**
  - When you have a child who needs behavior modification through role-playing, the first step is to set up a scenario for the child. This scenario should be one that the child either has been put in already, or one that the child is likely to experience in the future. For example: someone takes the child's turn on the recess field, someone bumps the child in the hall, or someone laughs at the child in front of the class.
  - Set the stage by telling the child what is happening and where it is happening. Include a triggering event, which would be the action or statement that has in the past or has the potential in the future to elicit inappropriate behavior. These can be true to life examples of things that have happened in the past, or examples of things that may happen in the future. Remember, the idea here is to teach appropriate behaviors, so be sure to use a wide range of examples through multiple role-playing sessions.

- **Assign Roles**
Once you've set the scene, identify the various fictional characters involved in the scenario. Some of these may be people who have to deal with the situation when it actually happens (for example, salespeople). Others will represent people who are supportive or hostile, depending on the scenario (for example, an angry client).

Once you've identified these roles, allocate them to the people involved in your role play exercise. They should use their imagination to put themselves inside the minds of the people that they're representing. This involves trying to understand the characters' perspectives, goals, motivations, and feelings when they enter the situation.

- **Discuss the Child's Emotions**
  - Once the student understands the situation, ask them how it makes them feel. For example: how does it make you feel that your friend took your turn on the playground? Helping the student verbalize their emotions will work towards enabling them to identify his feelings in the situation and choose a more appropriate response, despite their emotions.

- **Teach Appropriate Behavior for the Situation**
  - Ask the student how he/she can respond to the situation. You are looking for several options here. For example, he/she could walk away, he/she could start a fight, or he/she could tell a teacher. Once there are several options for responses, ask the student which option might be the best option given the specific situation. Be sure to use the teaching moment here and make sure the student knows that in some situations, more than one response can be appropriate. Take this time to also discuss why the other responses are inappropriate.
  - Using the steps outlined above will enable you to break down the specific behaviors that need to be taught, and teach them in an effective way. Be sure to use situations that are appropriate for the student and to discuss the student's emotions and appropriate behavior for the situation.

- **Discuss what you have learned**
  - When you finish the role-play discuss what you've learned so that you or the people involved can learn from the experience.
  - For example, if you're using role-play as part of a training exercise, you could lead a discussion on the scenarios you have explored, and ask for written summaries of observations and conclusions from everyone who was involved (Wagaman, 2008).

**Implications for Practice**

- Role playing should be implemented when child is calm.
- Role playing should be implemented along with other strategies that help increase
positive behavior.

- If role-playing to teach appropriate behavior, teacher should use many different scenarios to help students generalize.
- After the role play scenario, have the student discuss appropriate and inappropriate responses.
- Allow students time to think about their roles before role playing to help them get into character. (Wagaman, 2008).

Possible Adaptations/Modifications

- Can be adapted to different subjects and lessons to help students understand a concept better (e.g. Students role play molecular diffusion by pretending to be the molecules in order to help them better visualize and understand the process)
- Practice can be used for behavioral or academic use.
- Role play can be done with pairs instead of in a large group to avoid potential embarrassment of certain students.
- Role play situation could be adapted to be more personal to students to maximize the situation’s impact.
- Role play situations can be adapted to address specific student behaviors.
  (Krajsek & Vilhar, 2010)

Foundational References


Additional Links/Sources

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ox-7V-ybye8&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ox-7V-ybye8&feature=related)
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-R-fSrWbI-s
- http://books.google.com/books/about/Young_Childrens_Role_Playing_in_School.html?id=Y2oT5c8bcwMC

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