ROLE PLAY AND THEATER ACTIVITIES FOR SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

- Diana J. Feldman, MA, LCAT, RDT-BCT

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Education & Certifications
- Masters Degree in Educational Theatre from New York University (NYU)
- Board Certified Drama Therapist – highest level of certification for Drama Therapy
- Licensed Creative Arts Therapist – state certification, equivalent to a social worker’s license
- Certificate Program at the Institute for Not-for-Profit Management Executive Level at Columbia University

Awards & Recognitions
- The National Association of Drama Therapy’s Research Award in November 2010.
- American Group Psychotherapy Association’s Aaron Stein Memorial Award in 2005.
- Recognized by the United Way of New York City for exemplary achievement in improving public school attendance in 2005.
- “The ENACT Method of Employing Drama Therapy in Schools,” a chapter in Current Approaches in Drama Therapy Second Edition (Johnson & Emunah, 2009, co-written by Diana Feldman, MA, LCAT, RDT-BCT, ENACT President/CEO and Founder, Emilie Ward, LCAT, ENACT Director of Research & Training.)
ABOUT ENACT

• ENACT teaches social emotional learning through interactive creative drama and drama therapy techniques.
• The ENACT program uses professional actors, social workers, and drama therapists to deliver a unique curriculum. ENACT employs more than 50 teaching artists.
• ENACT has served 150,000 students since 1987.
• ENACT has trained over 7,500 teachers.
• ENACT works in 75-100 schools each year.
• ENACT has performed original plays in schools and in professional Broadway theatres.
• Outcomes of the ENACT program: better communication, improved self-esteem, coping skills, reduced dropout rates, acceptance of diversity, etc.

WORKSHOP GOALS

Teachers will learn

– Social Emotional Learning Competencies
– Some basic improvisation & theatre techniques
– Use of theatre techniques including
  • Developmental theatre games
  • Role-play
– How to facilitate through inquiry
– How to plan a creative drama workshop
– How to regularly assess the level of student engagement and learning
WHAT IS SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)?

The following is from CASEL.org, the website for the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning:

- Social and emotional learning involves the processes of developing social and emotional competencies in children.
- SEL programming is based on the understanding that the best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful;
- Social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student, citizen, and worker
- Many different risky behaviors (e.g., drug use, violence, bullying, and dropout) can be prevented or reduced when multi-year, integrated efforts develop students’ social and emotional skills.

THE 5 SEL COMPETENCIES

1. **Self-awareness**: Knowing what we are feeling in the moment; having a realistic assessment of our own values, interests and abilities; a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.
2. **Self-management**: Regulating emotions so they facilitate rather than interfere with the task at hand; being conscientious and delaying gratification to pursue goals; persevering in the face of setbacks and frustrations.
3. **Social awareness**: Understanding what others are feeling; being able to take their perspective; appreciating and interacting positively with diverse groups.
4. **Relationship skills**: Handling emotions in relationships effectively; establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resistance to inappropriate social pressure; negotiating conflict; seeking help when needed.
5. **Responsible decision-making**: Making decisions based on accurate consideration of all relevant factors and the likely consequences of alternative courses of action; taking responsibility for one’s decisions.
SEL OUTCOMES

• Improved communications
• Improved decision making skills
• Improved self-awareness
• A sense of well-being and personal success
• Improved classroom climate, which is linked to academic success.
• Ability to apply new skills & competencies in everyday life.

CLASSROOM PHILOSOPHY

ENACT Core Values

• We ALL have the potential to become self-aware.
• Change begins from within, We must recognize and respect our process of development.
• Acknowledgment and acceptance of the continual growth process in ourselves and others greatly assist the creation of personal and social change.
• A sense of responsibility for self and others is an outcome of self-awareness and a crucial step toward conscious change.
• The emotional condition has a direct impact on learning outcomes.
THE CREATIVE CONTAINER

• A safe environment that values the human spirit and provides emotional boundaries that neither overwhelm emotion nor distances them, a key factor that can slow down the learning process.

• The container ultimately encourages self-reflection -- connecting external experience with internal experience -- to ultimately allow for self-knowledge.
THE CREATIVE DRAMA APPROACH

ENACT’s 3-pronged method of delivery
• Theatre games
• Improvisational role-play
• Guided Facilitation

WHY USE CREATIVE DRAMA?

• Student engagement
• Works with students’ strengths
• Interactive
• Self-Reflective
• Opportunity to practice life skills
• Can ignite empathy
• Sparks Creativity!
THEATRE GAMES IN THE CLASSROOM

“Playing theatre games with your students will bring refreshment, vitality, and more. Theatre-game workshops are designed not as diversions from the curriculum, but rather as supplements, increasing student awareness of problems and ideas fundamental to their intellectual development.”

~ Viola Spolin, Theatre Games for the Classroom, A Teacher’s Handbook

DEVELOPMENTAL THEATRE GAMES

Most important elements of theatre games:

- Safety
- Success
- Validation

Levels of Structure & Interaction:

ENACT’s approach to developmental theatre games integrates drama therapy and skill building activities. To ensure emotional safety, always begin with a high degree of structure and loosen little by little to adapt to the student’s developmental level.

- **Unison Activities**: Group works as a whole. Often based on imitation.
- **Interpersonal Group Activities**: 2 or more people relate to each other. A brief interaction or give-and-take takes place.
- **Solo/Individual Activities**: An individual is called upon to do a task by himself/herself within the group. Individual activities should only be used when there is a significant level of safety in the room.
WHAT IS IMPROVISATION?

Improvisation is the art of acting and reacting, in the moment, to one's surroundings.

- This can result in the invention of new thought patterns or new ways to act. This invention cycle occurs more often when it is accompanied with a thorough or intuitive understanding of the skill being improved.
- Our pieces are unscripted for a reason. Our scenes need to be able to change and react to the needs of whatever audience is viewing it.
- The main character can change from male to female
- The tone of the character from a scene can sound like an 8-year-old one time and a 16-year-old the next just by changing a line like "Mommy, can't I go outside and play!?" to "You're so unfair Ma! Why can't I go out with my friends!?"

WHAT IS ROLE-PLAY?

Role play is the basis of all dramatic activity

- The ability to suspend disbelief by stepping into another character's shoes comes quite naturally to most children.
- Through the structure of the drama lesson this can be used to great effect, challenging children to develop a more sensitive understanding of a variety of viewpoints whilst sharpening their language and movement skills.
- By adopting a role, children can step into the past or future and travel to any location, dealing with issues on moral and intellectual levels. Thus role play can be easily utilized to illuminate themes across the curriculum.
DISTANCING

Characters should feel real and accessible, but should never directly reflect anyone in the room.

- If you make a character too different from the students, they will not relate and therefore lose interest.
- If you make the character too close to the students, you run the risk of “outing” someone, holding them up for ridicule, or causing the room to shut down.
- Choose issues that resonate with the students and characters that they recognize.

OPTIMAL DISTANCE

**Over-Distance**
- Cognitive, thought, no emotion involved
- Time not present, past, or future
- Little eye contact
- Little embodiment

**Under Distance**
- All emotion
- Present time
- Detailed recollection of past event
- Enactment of negative emotions
- Physical closeness
- Strong eye contact

(Based on the work of Robert Landy)
AESTHETIC DISTANCE

- Balance of emotion and reflection
- Balance of past and present time
- Balance of fantasy and reality events
- Balance of past recollection
- Balance of enactment of positive and negative emotions
- Optimal eye contact

FACILITATION

Facilitation through Inquiry

Asking questions to assess students’ learning and to introduce skills.

3 Phases of Facilitation

- **Identification:** Allows the teacher to determine if students know the material
  - *What is going on here? What is the relationship between the characters?*
- **Connection:** Allows the teacher to determine if students understand the material
  - *Who can relate to this situation? Did this scene seem real? Has anyone ever felt this way?*
- **Skill Integration:** Allows the teacher to determine if students have integrated the information
  - *What could the character do differently? (Try to elicit tools such as deep breathing or visualization)*
LESSON PLANNING

The Lesson Plan
- Should be tailored to meet specific classroom goals.
- The plan should address the SEL competency, a specific social theme, (such as peer pressure), and the group dynamic.

Format of the lesson plan
- Introduction/Warm-up
  - Gathering Activity
  - Theatre Game
- The main activity
  - Role-play
  - Facilitation
  - Replay
- Closure
  - An activity summing up the days activity
  - i.e. “1 Thing I Learned Today”

ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION

What is the evidence that students are learning the SEL competency? What are the indicators that allow you to see this?

- Did the students name the underlying feeling in the scene?
- Did they give a context from their own lives that matches the context in the scene?
- Did they demonstrate the SEL competency in the replay?
- Did they take ownership of the feeling?