

when appropriate, in a manner that does not compete with the significant individuals in the child's life. Alf can encourage the child to sit on mom's lap and cry just as he is doing with Alf. Alf can talk about himself as a child so that the child can identify with him, whereas, out of costume, the therapist is not a child but an adult. Thus, Alf can use the child experiences to model for the children in the group. Alf can "act out" in appropriate ways and thus channel energy positively.

As a fantasy figure, Alf helps the children learn to pretend and develop their creative potential. They are thus able to gain new perspectives for examining their life context. New views provide alternative means for problem solving. This process can thus move the child from a place of being "stuck" to one in which he or she can use inner resources to manage in a more creative fashion difficult situations in living. It is highly satisfying to a child therapist to see children helping each other to grow and change, facing adversity without denial, and realizing that they have the inner resources to manage. Thus, with Alf, the child can reach a point where he or she approaches a barrier and sees it as "no problem."

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The Sociodramatist and Sociometrist in the Primary School

TEENA LEE

ABSTRACT. This article focuses on the ways in which a sociodramatist and sociometrist can work with children in the primary school context. Action methods can be used to enhance creativity within the school context and to encourage children to be creative. Specific program designs are described along with the methods for putting them into operation. The value of the sociodramatist within the school system is affirmed.

PRIMARY SCHOOL IN AUSTRALIA spans the first 7 years of education after kindergarten or preschool. Children's ages usually range from 5 years to 11 or 12 years.

When my eldest daughter was attending "prep"—the first year of school—after successfully and enjoyably completing a year in kindergarten, I was struck by how rapidly a previously spontaneous, flexible child was becoming an intimidated, rigid child.

After the second day of school, my daughter announced that she did not like boys. I was amazed. During the last 2 years, her very best friend was a boy, and she had shown no sign of sexism before this statement.

I observed the playground, the friendship groups; I listened to the various children's reports of their experiences; I chatted with parents and teachers. What became most apparent to me was that the children quickly acquired rigid attitudes about relating and learning and conformed to these attitudes. The children seemed to understand that they needed to survive, to fit in, to know where they stood in the group.

The sociometrist inside me screamed for an opportunity to facilitate and slow down the emerging social rigidity. I wanted to present the possibility of safe role reversal and show the potential for social maturity and adaptability that can come from balancing groundedness with the ability to reverse roles in any part of the system. In an attempt to reach these goals in the two prep grades, I volunteered to run what I called Kids' Drama and Kids' Group Games. Fortunately, the administrators eagerly

accepted my offer and gave me a lot of freedom to work with the classes and the teachers.

I began the program with a number of aims. I hoped to encourage self-expression and to provide an opportunity for increased group cohesion within the class. I intended to increase everyone's understanding of the basis for a group and the child's place in a group. I wanted to promote broader life-coping skills and to have fun. After several weeks, I added to the list of goals, to increase their self-esteem and confidence. Over the years, this has emerged as a key issue in the development of health and human relations programs, particularly in drug prevention programs and protective behavior programs for child abuse prevention. I wanted the children to be able to act spontaneously, even in adult-structured and threatening environments. I had been surprised by how the children's spontaneity on the playground and their use of flowing role play became an almost unavailable behavior to them and needed enormous facilitation in the classroom setting. This behavior deficit changed markedly approximately two thirds of the way through the kids' program for the prep year. Shy children, however, needed more time. I decided the children should learn group discussion skills, which are usually not developed until Grade 2.

Other goals that I decided upon included having the children learn about the theater—actors, stage, audience—and providing appropriate channels for the children's excess energies. I planned to explore *themes* that were of relevance and concern to a particular class and age group. To model healthy interpersonal relations, I intended to express appreciation, respect others, handle conflicts fairly, and demonstrate the components of intimacy and friendship. With the older children, I hoped to broaden their social experiences and maturity.

Group Facilitation

My facilitation style changed somewhat, according to the age group and the previous experience of the children, but basically I operated as a socio-dramatist. After doing research, I wove together a theme of relevance, using a book or writing a little story or play in which to couch this theme. Before this reading and enactment, the group usually played at least two sociometric games that brought the group together by opening up patterns of connectedness and warming them to the theme. The games also provided outlets for time-limited expressions of noise and boisterousness.

After several enactments—which might be going on in multiple dyads, in role-reversal format for the second enactment, or in the more traditional actors-and-audience style, changing actors for a second enact-

ment—I facilitated a group discussion. Our discussions in the circle varied in length and depth, depending upon the age of the group. Closure often included a body contact exercise; an unwinding, calming element; and a "hand back" to the teacher. The sociometric action games, which may have specific or multiple aims, included cohesion builders, group connectedness mixers, discussion promoters, theme builders, action promoters, physical boundary stretchers, expression promoters, new role experience promoters, social experience broadeners, energy channelers, expression controllers, and self-esteem builders. I also used action spectragrams on a theme and occasionally action sociograms.

I kept the stories simple and brief for the younger children, often using picture books or TV characters. For the children a few years older, I used more of my own written mini plays because the themes were more complex, although the surface story remained fairly simple. I always aimed either to involve many in the action or to have a two-character story that everyone enacted in multiple dyads, with a role reversal for the second enactment.

Fostering Confidence and Overcoming Shyness

These activities were used with 5-year-olds after they had had about 6 weeks of drama with me. As we sat in a large circle, I explained to the group that we were going to do some things to help us if we were shy.

I began our discussion by asking the children if they were embarrassed with people or felt confident with people. I directed them to raise hands if they knew what confidence meant. They defined confidence as feeling okay or good when all sorts of different people are talking to you and maybe even looking at you. We continued our discussion of the meaning of confidence for a few minutes and then moved on to a spectrogram.

I moved three chairs to the front of the group and explained to the children the purpose of each. The first chair was to be used by children who felt shy with new visitors and when standing in front of the class. Those who sat on the second chair usually felt okay with new people and in class but sometimes were shy and embarrassed. Children who sat on the third chair felt good and were confident with a new visitor and with the class looking at them. I then asked the children to sit by turn on the chair of their choice, basing that choice on their assessment of their own confidence. Eleven chose the first chair, 8 the second chair, and 4 the third chair.

For the next exercise, we sat in a large circle. I explained that we were going to play a name game and that the children could think about how they felt—shy or confident or somewhere in between. I demonstrated

first to show the children how we would, in turn, stand up and say, "My name is . . ." or just say our names. The class would then clap after each person spoke. If a child could not follow the procedure, I would say, "Class, this is . . ." Once the introductions were finished, I asked the children to indicate by raising hands, whether they considered themselves shy or confident. I next read a story about someone who is painfully shy, *Little Miss Shy* by Roger Hargreaves. The children listened to the story, and I showed them the pictures.

For an enactment of the story, we assembled simple props, and I selected actors from the volunteers, giving preference to the shy children. At the end of the play, we in the audience applauded and praised the volunteer actors. All of the group now participated in role play, walking around being Miss Shy or Mr. Quiet. This was followed by having all assume the role of Mr. Funny. The children strode about with bodies erect and heads up, being confident. I stressed to the children that the secret to being confident is practice. Again the children assumed roles, this time being Mr. Confident and Miss Confident, and practiced walking around the room. We enacted two quick situations to promote confidence. We pretended we were part of a heritage day ceremony, where children help with the planting of a tree. We enacted a ceremony where children receive awards for good work. During closure back in the large circle, I emphasized practice and encouraged the children to practice when they play outside or at home.

Addressing the Problems of Change, Loss, and Death

I used these exercises with Grade 2 children (approximately 7 years old), a group in which one child had just lost a grandfather and several others had experienced loss over the previous 6 months. I had worked periodically with these children over 2½ years.

With everyone sitting in a large circle, we began the session with a name game. I pretended to throw a ball to a person across the circle as I called out the person's name. I chose a new person each time.

For the next activity, I directed the children to turn in the circle so that each faced the back of the child to the left. I directed the children to pretend that the backs before them were playdough to be kneaded, rolled out, to be molded into shape, pushed into a statue, and glazed. I then directed the children to turn, find the back of the person on the right, and to pretend it was a road map. On this map, they located a house in Melbourne and raised a hand if they had lived in Melbourne. I asked the children to pretend that they were in a heavy truck, traveling to their houses, the school, and the shops. They traveled to the railway station where they

left the truck and boarded a fast train. During the dyad work, the children worked with the partner of their choice, talking with a different person about each topic. The talk centered on having moved one or more times, big changes in one's life or family, the loss of pets, the death of a grandparent or some other significant person, or sick grandparents.

Before beginning my story, I explained to the children that there was some excitement in it and some sadness. I told them that I knew some people had been feeling sad and it was not good to feel sad alone or to keep this feeling held in.

Missing a Day of School

One Monday Mrs. Withers received two notes saying that two members of her class would be away from school the next day.

One child, Damian, was very excited because his grandma and grandpa were arriving by airplane from overseas. He had really missed them. He knew they would be so pleased to see him at the airport with his mum. Probably they would have a little present for him—special soap from a hotel or packets of sugar from a restaurant.

The other child was Tina, who felt quite different. She knew she was really going to miss her grandpa, who had died the day before. She would be missing school to go to his funeral. She had always got on well with "Pa," and it was hard to believe that he wouldn't be there anymore to read to her or take her for walks. Mummy and Daddy and everyone else were very sad too.

When Tina and Damian talked about their grandmas and grandpas that day, it made the other kids in the class think about their own grandparents.

Many of them had wonderful grandparents who showed them lots of love. Some didn't see their grandparents much because they lived somewhere else. Some children's grandparents had already died. A few children didn't really get on with their grandparents very well.

A couple of days later, Tina was still feeling pretty sad. Damian noticed this. He had with him three soaps, two little toothbrushes, and six bags of sugar from his grandparents' trip. He'd brought them for "Show and Tell."

He decided to give Tina the six bags of sugar. He quietly said to Tina, "I love my grandpa, and I hope he never dies, not 'til I'm a grown-up anyway."

Tina nodded and took the sugar. She felt a little bit better because someone had shown her he cared.

At the end of the story, I told the class that we are going to act out three scenes related to the story. The children portrayed the airport scene—the grandparents coming off the plane into the busy airport and being greeted by Damian and his family. We dramatized Tina's grandfather's funeral, imagining what might have been said in his eulogy. The children also acted out the scene in which Damian gave the sugar bags to Tina.

In the large-group discussion after the dramas, we considered the loss of a grandparent and talked about what is the hardest part of coping with

that loss. We checked to see who had healthy grandparents and who had sick grandparents. We talked about the fact that missing people and losing friends are a bit of the same feeling. We stressed that you do not need to keep sadness to yourself, that sadness can last a while, and that friends are really important.

Using Sociometric Games With New Groups

At the beginning of a new school year or in a new group, I have used sociometric games to promote cohesion. I often began with a name game in which each person in a large circle said his or her name and the group repeated the name twice and followed it with a sequence of actions. For example, after repeating the name of person 1 twice, the children clapped twice; after person 2, they tapped their heads twice; after person 3, they honked their noses twice. The group repeated the sequence around the circle until all were named. For dyad activities, I divided the group into two concentric circles. For each activity, one of the circles was instructed to move, and a new dyad formed. These activities proved successful: Partners pretended to be two moving parts of a machine; one partner was clay, and the other molded it carefully; one partner was a television, the other turned it on, changed the channel, and adjusted the volume. Once the actions were completed, the partners reversed their characterizations and performed the actions again. Another activity involved the use of free movement and sounds. A whistle may have meant fly like a bird; a drum, hop; a clacker, roar like a lion; a bell, stop; a xylophone, find a new partner. Then the dyad activity was repeated.

An Observation

This taste of the use of sociodrama in a school setting demonstrated for me how important and valuable the presence of at least one sociodramatist in each school would be addressing the issues of human relations and self-esteem.

BOOK REVIEW

Suicide in Children and Adolescents. 1990. Edited by George MacLean. Toronto: Hogrefe & Huber.

This small volume with only five articles presents one of the best overviews on suicide in children and adolescents. Most of the authors are Canadian, working in the Ottawa area, and are recognized as among the leaders in the field of childhood and adolescent depression and suicide.

In the first article, Joffe and Offord discuss epidemiology. Here, the incidence of suicide among children and adolescents is reviewed worldwide, with special attention given to the United States and Canada. They also consider psychosocial correlates of suicide and the methods most frequently used.

Editor George MacLean contributes the article on clinical perspectives. Giving us an overview of concepts of death from a developmental perspective, he reviews the psychodynamics related to youthful suicide and then discusses the process of assessment.

MacLean is also the author of the article on depressive disorders in children and adolescents. He devotes the first part of this article to his review of the syndrome of depression in children and adolescents and how this is linked with suicide. He gives a brief overview of DSM III R terminology and concludes with a detailed assessment process.

Cynthia Pfeffer, in her article on the manifestation of risk factors, offers a clear profile of how one must examine carefully for suicide as a potential in children and adolescents. She discusses the spectrum of suicidal behavior and how features differ depending upon the age grouping of the children. She elaborates on the concept of a suicidal episode, which is a discrete event or period that has an onset, a time period or duration of expression, and an offset time. This enables the therapist to focus on the episode as a unit. She discusses the classes of risk factors by dividing children into an affect group, a coping-mechanism group, an interpersonal group, and a developmental group. These groupings interact to create a dynamic equilibrium in which the relative influence of a particular cluster of risk factors may vary at a particular time.

The final chapter by Simon Davidson focuses on management. He discusses media awareness, public awareness, the importance of school-

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