

Role Playing in the Relig Class

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"In The Other Man's Moccasins" By Stanley Grabowski
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CODE: rp will be used in place of role playing

"Do not judge another man, says a wise old Indian proverb, "Until you have first walked in his moccasins".

How many times have you had your actions and motives misinterpreted? And how often have you misjudged someone else, unaware of his feelings and circumstances? You have your say; he has his. Still neither understands the others problems or appreciates his point..

To begin to understand a person;s problems, actions, his motives and/or his feelings, you have to make an effort to project yourself into circumstances with an attitude like his. You have to attempt the impossible: you have to try to be him.

This is what happens in that educational activity known as role-playing, which came into the schools after it had been used successfully to train management personnel. It permits students to put on the other man's moccasins, to stimulate his problems in a situation contrived to approximate his. So in a sense, students experience the viewpoint of the other person in a way that promotes better understanding of his thoughts, actions, and problems.

The situations and problems that can be structured for role playing are many. But there are limits, Race relations, parent-child conflicts, poverty, national identity, war and moral problems can be explored from a personal point of view-but with limits. Thosesubjective factors of the person actually experiencing the real situation that is being simulated in the class can never be projected adequately. Then too, a false sense of understanding is a constant hazard. How can a well-fed, middle class child even begin to know the feelings of hunger and misery of a slum child? How can a secure suburban American know what a Vietnamese peasant feels for his small piece of land, ravaged or threatened by war?

Care must be taken that role playing is never reduced to a mere game that is a least more fun than a chapter in a book. Role playing is a game-but a game played with all seriousness and with a purpose. To explore a situation, to thoroughly know all circumstances, to thoughtfully reflect on the other man;s disposition, and to risk experiencing his feelings and reactions are not to be taken lightly.

Besides aiding understanding of another's thinking and actions, role-playing can expand the learning process beyond passive response to a book, or other medium, or by hearing it from another person.

Teachers still too often are under the impression that "teaching" is no more than "telling" things to students. This is not always the case, nor should it be. Ask any mother who has told her child dozens of times to remove boots before entering the house. In desperation she may turn to her child and say, "What would you do if you were in my place?" What the mother is suggesting is that if the child could put himself in her shoes-player role in this instance-he might better understand her point of view.

Since Religion always involved social responsibilities-relations with other people-role playing can be very effective in the Relig class. It can help students relate to others in an atmosphere of mutual understanding by allowing them to experience vicariously another person's

thoughts and feelings. Role playing enables students to experiment with different ways of behaving without the direct risk involved in an actual incident. They can participate in "real life" without being personally threatened by the situation. Role playing allows the students to experience emotional as well as intellectual involvement.

A slight diversion-Any emotional involvement carries with it some risk-an-exposure of our real feelings, our inner selves. Effective role-playing supposes we will hazard a situation that can demand we honestly examine feelings of hostility or fear or contempt or indifference. So risk is a real part of role playing. But the risk is only emotional.

The biggest problem facing the teacher who wants to use role playing in Relia class is that of introducing a role-playing situation. The situation must be real enough and pertinent so that it invites involvement. It should flow naturally from a topic already considered in class. All circumstances that bear on the issue should already have been introduced or otherwise be apparent to the player and spectators.

The first time the teacher uses role playing in the classroom, he will have to take the lead in outlining the situation. For example, if the class is discussing parent-child problems the teacher might say, "Why don't we act out a situation in which a girl and her mother are having arguments about her coming home late from dates? In order to do the situation, we'll need 3 volunteers to act the roles of the daughter, the father, and the mother. Who would like to play the part of the daughter? etc.

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This being the first time that the class is to participate in rp, there may be a deadly silence-the kind that follows a teacher's call for volunteers. If the teachers remain calm and composed, someone will come forward, if for no other reason than to break the uneasy silence. After the first student, other will follow.

When the 3 players have been decided on, the teacher reviews the elements of the situation and the roles. It is much better if the teacher could get the entire class to develop the situation by discussion but the first time around, it may be more feasible for the teacher to do it alone. This is the way the teacher might do it in the example we are following:

"Let's suppose that Audrey is a 16 year old junior in high school. On several occasions during the past month, she has come home as an hour later than her father allowed her to stay out on dates. This evening her father very explicitly told her to be home by 11:30 p.m., or else she would lose all dating privileges for a month. Both parents are awake and worried, waiting for Audrey, discussing her habitual tardiness. Her mother is in agreement with Audrey's father about keeping the curfew, but is more lenient than the father about punishment. It is five minutes past midnight as Audrey comes into the house.

After introducing the situation, the teacher gets the rp underway by giving the players a single cue, such as "Audrey, you have just closed the door and your father says to you: "Okay, where have you been? It's past midnight, and you were supposed to be home by 11:30 p.m."

The players are allowed to carry on their dialogue for a few minutes. There is no script, of course, and the players are entirely on

Thier own. The teacher and the rest of the class listen. When the teachers judges that the players have sufficiently explored the situation and have established the point the rp is suppose to evoke.

The next step is for the players to tell how they felt about themselves as well as the pther participants in the role playing. Then, the rest of the class as permitted to comment on the rp. After, that the the teacher might want to direct a question (s) to the class to help them critique the rp. Here are a few sample questions the teacher can use: "Do you think the action seemed real? Why or why not? What do you think was the real problem? How might Audrey have answered her father when he reminded her that? Was she fair to her parents? Were they fair to her?

The critique, obviously, is an important part of the rp. technique. It serves as an analysis of the problem by the group and an exploration of some possible proposals for solution.

Some of the proposals suggested can be tired out by the re-enactment of the situation, with the same players, switching roles around, or with a new set of actors. Have the same actors switch roles gives them a different insight to the problem. Depth of experience.

After an evaluation of the rp and any discussion that may follow the teacher ought to summarize the problem or problems discovered by the students and highlight the insights gained by them..

Role playing in catechetics can be a highly useful method for learning how to live with other people, an as well as with ones-self, and to observe and correct mistakes in human relations. Rp can be misused. It should never be used to shame an individual, for example, by asking that student to play himself in the role of a jealous student when he really is one. Rp is a sensitive tool useful in probing social problems. It should never be allowed to deteriorate into mere busy work or classroom entertainment.

Here in summary, are the basics to follow in rp:

1. Identify a problem under study that is suitable to rp.
2. Constuct a situation to illustrate the problem.
3. Ask for volunteers to act out the roles.
4. Introduce the scene with a specific cue.
5. Ket the players act out the situation.
6. Stop the play when the purpose of the rp is achieved.
7. Discuss and evaluate the rp with the actors and the class.
8. Possibly, re-enact the rp with the same players taking different role
9. Summarize.

The first try at role playing may be awkward; but after a few times, both the teacher and students will come to appreciate it as a great means of exploring the deeper dimensions and meanings and implications of one's attitude-moral-or social as it affects relations with others.

For further info on role playing, ask the Central Office or speak with one or many of the teachers who have used it successfully.