

Role Playing and Environmental Issues

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Introduction

I wish to make clear from the outset that I am not an environmental educator and therefore do not claim to be steeped in particular contemporary issues. I am aware of environmental concerns from a generalist viewpoint, one which I share with primary teachers expected to deliver environmental educational policy in practice. As an educator and researcher in the area of arts education, I frequently apply role playing methodologies to a range of curriculum areas focusing on human issues and would like to share some insights into its specific application to environmental education. I also wish to state that I have a particular interest in developing a socially critical approach to educational issues, so that the use of role play is coloured by this stance.

I have examined a number of policy statements which attempt to influence the content and teaching approaches to environmental education in schools. The Victorian Ministry of Education (1990) *Environmental Education* makes reference to the importance of student/teacher attitudes, beliefs and dispositions in the social construction of environmental education. Role play deals 'up front' with the dispositions of all participants, and thus would seem an ideal vehicle for investigating the human aspects of learning for the environment. The Victorian document (1990: p.11) further makes clear the approaches teachers should adopt when realising environmental education in practice. Approaches to environmental education should be 'based on real problems', 'clarify values', be 'socially critical' and 'action oriented', and also 'involve students working together in groups'. I wish to demonstrate how this cluster of recommended approaches can be met through the use of role play.

The paper has two intentions: The first is to discuss how role play can facilitate recommended environmental education in theory. The second is to show how these ideas may be practically realised during the investigation of a selected issue.

Learning through experience, clarifying values and working in groups

Active learning and role play

Despite the recommendations of environmental policy makers, it is not always possible or desirable to have students investigating issues within direct life situations. Environmental problems may be sited within dangerous contexts, e.g. at a logging camp, or the aftermath of an environmental disaster. We know also that an understanding of conservation issues might be heightened if students have an opportunity to experience the splendour of a rainforest at first hand. Similarly, it is unusual to have immediate access to the human sites where issues are actively contested, i.e. public meetings, national and international forums. It seems that

some issues may only be examined at a distance from student and teacher experiences. This is where role play comes into its own. It can provide useful simulations of human experiences that might otherwise have remained at an abstract level for students. Role play is a process of enactment based on theories derived from role-taking in everyday life (see for instance Goffmann, 1959). Players act out specific roles which may be suggested and discussed beforehand. Role players agree to act as if the roles were really their own (Jones, 1980). Each player, possibly including the teacher, provides part of the social construction for other players so that all contribute to the simulation.

When roles have been determined, players are placed into simulated situations which reveal, as closely as possible, the beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of those who hold these roles in real life. The successful execution of a role play is dependent on players' perceptions of how persons in specific roles 'do' or 'should' behave within certain social contexts. The situation or scenario is more than just a place where the action happens. Rather it is a specific context in which the selection of roles, description of events and role relationships focus deliberately on predetermined human dilemmas. Those taking part are invited to consider what it is like to take on someone else's role in society or to face a challenging problem within some selected situation. Role players then seek to resolve the problem.

The notion of 'play' is derived from the activity's proximity to that of a 'game'. Role play has set rules and, as with other games, can generate a great deal of player commitment. Unlike other games, however, the emphasis is not so much on winning, or producing obvious rewards, but more on how the role player as learner comes to engage in the process of decision-making.

Understanding in role play is achieved through direct participation. Rather than merely talking about human behaviour and environmental issues at a hypothetical level, role play necessarily engages students in a more direct, 'this is happening to me now' way (Colquhoun & Errington, 1990). An important difference is claimed between talking about a problem, as in a debate, and assuming the problem to be your own, (and acting on that assumption; see Milroy, 1982: p.11). Although, we may not enable students to walk through a rainforest, or be present at debates on conservation, role play can be used to reconstruct those human dispositions which determine an environmental issue. In this sense, it can be employed to assist students in learning through experience.

Clarifying values in role play

Students within role play have important opportunities to express their personal and shared views regarding a stance on an environmental issue. By making beliefs and attitudes explicit, they can then be presented for scrutiny. It may be argued that a simple debate would do the same task. However, in role play, students are invited to test out their theories in practice. For instance, a student may believe that demolishing homes to make way for a new bridge is an unimportant issue. However, when this same student is appointed (in role) to address those who are to be evicted initial complacency may change to concern

for those involved. Some students may not realise their stand on an issue until it is challenged by others. Moreover, students may be given opportunities to argue against their previous/personal position by taking a role which represents opposing or alternative viewpoints.

Following role interaction, students may be invited to critically reflect on their experience; this further enhances prospects of values being clarified and, if necessary changed by 'being there' at the centre of an issue. Students out of role, declare where they now stand on an issue, and may relate their journey of understanding to others.

Working together investigating issues

Students using role play are also able to work together. The teacher aims to create those same human structures used in the conventional pursuit of environmental issues; namely: informal conversations; group discussions; public meetings; formal debates; international forums and so on. Having students cooperating on an issue is fundamental to this approach. Students, in and out of role, create the fiction and share the on-going contest and negotiation of issues in a realistic fashion. There is a chance for students to experience the ways that role takers in life ally themselves with others and contest issues in a political way. Successful outcomes to issues can involve the formation of allegiances, the selection of specific knowledge about issues, and thoughtful exercise of power within the constraints of role.

An important aspect of working with others is the development of empathetic understanding. It is assumed that by playing the role of someone else, possibly with different viewpoints from their own, students may have more respect for the stances of others. The relationship between empathy and role play is illustrated in a student's remark that, 'if you are role playing you can find out what it is that gives the other side its conviction', (quoted by Milroy, 1982:p.190). The notion that students in role have 'conviction' hints at the commitment with which some players may hold their views, in spite of pressures from other role participants to surrender a particular stance. The rhetoric of role play suggests that the more kinds of roles students adopt in role play, the more empathetic they are likely to be towards the imagined predicaments of other players and, ultimately, to people in 'real' life. Thus, students examining an issue of chemical spillage in rivers using role play would be encouraged to see all viewpoints, and the impact on the environment.

Investigating real problems and relevant issues

'Real' problems are defined as those which are not predetermined in advance with reference to processes and ends. In terms of our 'chemical pollution' topic, we may as a point of information ask: 'what chemicals constitute a pollutive atmosphere?' But this is only the beginning of our investigation. We may add: 'who within society has the power to create or control the pollution?' The 'who' goes beyond the individual personalities to include all role holders with a vested interest in the pollution issue.

Making issues real for students

Using role play, environmental education can be made more real to students by siting issues within fixed specific locations. Rather than pollution being an issue 'out there', it is experienced as a series of human dilemmas. As role players, students are forced to take a stance for/against the issues as enacted within a specific example of pollution. The distance of self to the issue is closed further when students experience the complexities of the issue as victims and/or creators of pollution. Opportunities for critical reflection on experience allow students to see how the problem was created initially. It also permits them to see the reactions of people to the problem, and, allows for speculation on the consequences and implications of events. A generalised or abstracted issue such as 'pollution' can be placed back into what di Chiro (1987:p.25) terms the 'realm of possibility', where 'ordinary people are able to do something to change the problem'. Using role play, students see from direct experience that environmental problems may have identifiable human causes, effects, and ultimately, are alterable by humankind.

The power of 'ordinary people' can be brought home to students when environmental issues are sited within local settings: 'What would our reaction be if a nuclear power station was to be constructed here where we live?' Localising problems can serve to make issues more real as the context comes closer to that being lived by students in their daily lives.

Real issues can also generate uncertainty and lead to equally uncertain outcomes. For role play to be used successfully, there has to be real environmental issues to explore - ones where the ends have not been determined beforehand. One example of a predetermined approach is to be found in a curriculum package constructed by Canipe, (1982: p.1). Here an environmental issue, ('nuclear energy'), is presented 'as if' it is to be explored: Aims state that '...students will become involved in research required to determine the need for a (nuclear) power plant'. The only type of power plant to be selected is nuclear. Other alternatives are placed beyond the contention of role players. Canipe goes on to state that, 'once the need is established, students must determine the location and the kind of plant to be built'.

There then follows further recommendations for teachers whose students are not convinced that one should be built: 'It is suggested that students who are opposed to the building of power plants be assigned to a position opposed to the one they hold to help them understand the viewpoints of others'. This follows the reasonable notion mentioned earlier about having students see others' point of view by reversing roles. However, what is lacking is an opportunity for those who support the nuclear power station to assume a role which opposes it. In this instance, the use of the role play is biased in favour of building nuclear power plants and is supportive of one political view. There appears to be little opportunity for students to investigate the consequences and implications for the specific choice of power station. As will be seen from the practical example given later, all environmental options of this kind have effects upon the lives of those within the area of the power station. What land will the station occupy? Who will gain/lose by this decision? What does the local population think about

this decision? In summary, there is little to be gained in trying to stack the role playing investigation in favour of any one viewpoint unless helping students to recognise the vested interests of those engaged in environmental debate.

Questions to ask when exploring real issues

In order to identify 'real' problems, and explore these in role play, the teacher needs to ask oneself : 'From which standpoints are we looking at this issue? What other viewpoints surround the issue? How might we contest the issue using role play?' Students may be encouraged to ask their own questions, for example, 'what are my thoughts and feelings about this issue? What would be this role holder's beliefs?' What choices are open in terms of relevance to all parties? Questions help determine real issues and, in turn, give rise to other questions, thus representing the real world of problem solving.

Role play as a collaborative learning process can be used to repoliticise problems and, using the roles available, place participants and the problem back into the 'realm of possibility'. In this vision experts are seen as groups or individuals with particular vested interests whose power is channelled through the knowledge they own. As such, all roles have equal representation and power in the contest of active debate.

In selecting issues for representation in role play, we need to examine carefully the construction of events so that all relevant parties are represented within the scenario, specifically those who may be discriminated against on the grounds of gender, equity, race, and/or disability. How can the interests of these minority groups be investigated through role play in relation to both the built and the physical environment? These are questions a teacher may wish to consider when making decisions about the choice of issues to be explored.

Those environmental issues, roles, scenarios and flexible structures which allow for the interrogation of taken-for-granted knowledge of the environment should be selected. That is, to develop 'an environmentally aware and active citizenry' which is 'self-critical in its role in sustaining the social structures and relations that cause and support those problems (di Chiro, 1987:p. 24).

Being socially critical using role play

Much of what has been discussed already has indicated a socially critical approach to the pursuit of environmental issues using role play. A 'socially critical' stance is one which questions some taken-for-granted assumptions of educators regarding decisions about teaching, learning and knowledge. It serves to interrogate the social, political and cultural contexts in which the acts of education take place. It is appropriate at this point to examine the characteristics of role play construction to show how we may engage students in a socially critical environmental education. For role play to be successful, it is necessary to present roles and scenarios in a problematical manner, advance the value of 'uncertainty', and place value on the knowledge of students.

Avoiding stereotypical roles

A problem for both students and some teachers is the notion of stereotyping roles. For example: Van Ments (1983: p.101) points out that :

Where distinctive social roles appear such as the police officer, social worker, landlord, trade unionist or politician, their roles are written in such a way as to conform to the prevailing ideas on how such people behave...

There is a need to draw attention of students to their commonsensical views of people holding specific roles in society. We need to show that role holders are real people with real concerns. The 'tree lopper' and the 'conservationist' can become stereotypical 'capitalists' or 'greenies' if their interests and motivations are not analysed. They remain simplistic reproductions of those very real problems besetting change in the world. Students need to be made aware if they are blindly following two dimensional representations of characters from television. Stereotyping may be minimised in a number of ways. Students may be asked questions during or after the role play. Within the role play, they may be asked: 'Why are you for the removal of chemical waste in this way?' This is better than asking: 'What does a conservationist do?' The emphasis is placed on the motivation and attitudes of specific role holders, rather than performing a theatrical (television) character. Following the role play, teacher and students may discuss the interaction of role players' interests and the reasons for specific action. Thus, the teacher does not spend time commenting on the 'good' performance of students.

The position students take up is more important than portraying a role. We expect students to have commitment to their role task, so it is important that we are serious in our intentions, especially when taking a role ourselves. If the issues and the role players themselves remain disengaged from the reality of the real world (via stereotyping), then how can the beliefs and ideas of participants be transformed and alternative visions of the environment be perceived and achieved?

Making scenarios problematical

In order to engage students in a socially critical investigation, then social settings, political motives and cultural backgrounds have to be considered. A way forward is to draw up a list of role takers involved in the issue. Though alliances might occur among role identities with shared interests, a genuine investigation will allow for contestation, described by Robottom (1985: p.1) as 'a process in which self-interested individuals and groups in a social organisation cooperate, compete and negotiate in a complex interaction aimed at solving social problems.'

The construction of scenarios has to be given careful attention if we are to avoid representating stereotypical events. What contextual problem can provide the means for genuine investigation? It is here that teachers and students need space to challenge each other's assumptions about what constitutes and legitimises these selected realities. Both parties may be quick to draw their experiences from the media and these will need to be challenged in terms of 'real'

life. Each of us edits our own life experiences. As with the television producer, we select our public experiences carefully. Scenarios are selected to allow for a range of human sites to be explored. In the example of chemical pollution, we may use the boardroom, the streets outside, families at home, the Community Hall as places where people meet and contest issues. The scenario will relate to students the circumstances that resulted in the present state of affairs. It provides the information students as role holders need to know, and also the point at which role players will enter the picture. Information supplied by the teacher is crucial in shaping the scenario. There is a need to indicate the social (interest groups and their stance), political (the power these groups have) and cultural (where these humans are based) factors which will drive the role play.

Once selected, we ask how the scenario itself might become problematic and just what are we taking for granted in this picture? Each party will have a vested interest in advancing its own lived events and so collaboration is essential if the minority interests mentioned earlier are to be given a voice. The critical reflection mentioned earlier can be used to raise issues. Detachment from both the role and the enactment is encouraged so that students may learn to assess for themselves the impact of interest on an issue. Students may be encouraged to discuss their own role from the inside and outside. Questions are asked about the manipulation of role interests ('Why were the local inhabitants asked to do that?') and motivations towards particular actions ('Why do you think they decided to dump the waste there?'). Assumptions about actions are not taken-for-granted as the teacher attempts to demystify the unfolding role play.

In planning a scenario, the teacher attempts to plan for 'uncertainty', not only in the outcomes as discussed earlier, but also the unfolding processes of the role play. Teachers may be pleasantly surprised about what students know when interacting in role. Role players are not told what to say or how to say it. The teacher endeavours to provide sufficient information so that students can proceed without having to continually ask for further instructions. The teacher usually fragments the experience so that pieces of the problem may be enacted then reflected upon. This also allows an examination of different viewpoints. Importantly, students are constantly reminded that they are only representing experience, they do not have to be emotionally 'sucked in' to it. The socially critical value of role is maximised where the teacher allows for reasoned detachment and reflection when investigating issues.

The value of uncertainty in role play

Stevenson (1987: p.75) notes 'pedagogy in environmental education ought to be problematic in the sense that the way for students (and teachers) to solve environmental problems is uncertain.' When students enter role play, neither they nor the teacher can really foresee the outcomes. Standpoints are constrained by specific parameters of the roles students play, but there are also emergent viewpoints and considerations which are only aired as a result of the interaction between players. Teacher and students may only be able to make real decisions after all the evidence has been investigated within the role play.

We fool ourselves if we believe that there are salient solutions behind each environmental problem. Students and teachers need to take risks, to see perhaps that the very uncertainties we fear may lead us to 'real' issues and 'real' problems.

Beyond planning for a particular solution, there may be many solutions to one problem. Each option is likely to have its own implications and consequences. For instance when seeking answers to problems of urban growth, we do not begin and end our questioning with: 'What option is best for the planning of the freeway?' Rather, we frame the problem in human terms by asking: 'What impact will this option have on those living here? How are these developers shaping the environment?' These are more open questions and make planning more difficult. To what extent should we plan our work? If we plan too much, then we risk students plodding through the motions of investigating an issue without ever experiencing the unpredictability of outcomes and the interrogation of other factors necessary in the exploration of issues. However, if planning is at a minimum, there may be a fear that 4C will riot, get bored, or do both. Neither will happen if the teacher provides students with sufficient information to get the role play underway, and is also willing to stop, reflect, assure students, and encourage each step of the way.

To maximise the value of role play as a vehicle for socially critical environmental education, it is suggested that teachers raise students' political consciousness by imitating, as closely as possible, rituals of rule making, agenda setting, lobbying, persuading, and other aspects of communication which assist the effective articulation of issues.

Stevenson (1987: p.73) adds that if students are able to act on decisions made, then there is an allied need to incorporate knowledge of the political-legal process with skills for political advocacy. Through role playing students should be able to engage in the politics of action, where decisions and subsequent implications can be examined in an active way. The effects of such decisions can provide useful development of the original issue.

More aware students can come to rationally justify their political stance within various scenarios and from different role standpoints, while others can be guided towards this goal. Role play can provide opportunities for the development of advocacy skills in the pursuit of real environmental issues, where dominant assumptions about power groups, cultural differences and dispossessed minorities can be challenged and re-evaluated in the light of transformed experience.

The value of 'working knowledge'

Greenall Gough and Robottom (1990: p.4) describe students as 'agents for producing working knowledge through interaction with others in socially significant tasks'. They are referring to the students' own and shared knowledge which arises from an active engagement in environmental education issues. An active engagement in role play aims at transforming, rather than simply reproducing, student beliefs. Students can be helped to see that knowledge is not

a fixed entity and its use depends on manipulation by role players in simulated sites (the school, the community, society).

It is important that 'working knowledge' gained through practice is treated with value, integrity and respect by all parties. The information gained by students from elsewhere can be put into practice. Moreover, when knowledge can be seen as useful and potent in determining the course and outcomes of environmental issues, then its value is likely to appreciate in the minds of students. Knowledge may be viewed as a partial view of the world as each role player presents only one aspect of the debate. Students link the use of knowledge with specific self-interests and realise that their own selection is also a political one. Thus, the selection of knowledge needs to be reflected on in a critical manner. We ask: 'Whose knowledge is this, and whose interests does it serve?'

I attempt now to house the above theoretical factors within a practical framework by offering one example of environmental education, using role play in a socially critical manner. It may fall short of its aims, but nevertheless gives a flavour of the potential of role play in the area.

Role play in practice: 'extending the freeway'

The investigation of the issue is divided into three parts. The first helps students look at the issue from one set of viewpoints, the planners. It aims to show students that there are no easy environmental options, even though there is one set of views. Then, an examination is made of the implications of decisions made in the first session. These consequences of decision-making are made real as students face the problems created by the planners. Finally, we look at one way in which contesting viewpoints can be brought together so that views may be aired. The teacher creates a social structure, with rules and methods of procedure that imitate the political constructions found in formal meeting places in real life.

The issue from one set of viewpoints

The teacher wishes to show how views about an environmental issue are not always polarised into two opposing positions. There are no simple options. Issues are seen as realistically complex and may also generate further problems.

Introducing the Role Play and discussing the Scenario

Students are shown a map of an imaginary township called 'Wayville' which is situated between two cities, 'Franklin' and 'Murray'. The map shows that Wayville has a church, fire station, four long rows of houses, a small shopping centre, a Community Hall, a Wildlife Reserve and a primary school. To the north, Wayville has a large marshy area containing precious native flora and fauna. In the south is a large stretch of woodland with some very old trees. Franklin is five kilometres to the east of Wayville, and to the west is Murray eight kilometres away. The road adjoining these two cities bisects Wayville. At the eastern edge of the map one can see the terminal point of a freeway coming from Franklin; it parallels the present road and stops one kilometre from Wayville.

Students are given the following scenario:

Town planners from Franklin and Murray have decided to extend the present freeway to link both communities. Many people in Murray work in Franklin and see great advantages to the proposed route. A survey of Franklin and Murray residents shows overwhelming support for the connection of the two cities. Both see the advantages of job creation that such a move would bring. Although the Department of Main Roads have not yet approved the extension, they encourage respective parties to lobby their cause. No decisions have been made about the likely freeway route.

Students are presented with two issues: 'Where should the freeway be routed?' and 'Why has this particular route been selected?'

[Students have been presented with a number of critical issues focusing on the extension of the freeway. Clearly, there are no salient answers. Students are helped to see that each option is driven by the interests of particular parties. The teacher asks students if further clarification is needed on this issue]

Determining the roles

Students are asked 'Who is likely to be affected by the freeway extension?' and 'Who has the power to influence the issue?' Teacher and students together compile a list of role labels on the chalkboard. From Wayville, students identify: 'tenants of rented houses, home owners, shop owners, local counsellors, a representative of the Wayville native reserve, a group of ornithologists and unemployed persons'.

From Murray and Franklin, they locate: 'road planners, architects, members of builders' unions, two bank managers, a Department of Main Roads representative, and a Federal Member of Parliament'.

[This list identifies the roles to be played and will allow the issue to be investigated from different viewpoints.]

Next, students are asked to identify where the issues might be sited. Responses include: 'informal gatherings on the streets of Wayville, formal meetings at the boardrooms of Franklin/Murray, at the public meeting hall in Wayville, in the homes of affected residents and/or at the town hall in Franklin/Murray'.

[The teacher chooses some of these, but has not yet told the students which ones. Students are reminded again of the issue, the list of roles, and where decisions are likely to take place. Students have used role play before with this teacher and within the discussion it becomes clear that they are expecting to explore the problem predominantly from the perspective of Wayville inhabitants. Instead the teacher chooses a less obvious starting point: the design of the freeway route and the reasoning behind this particular choice.]

Beginning the action: Planning the freeway

After a discussion about likely tasks facing road planners, the teacher divides the students into threes. She tells A and B that they are planners meeting to decide on the freeway route. Each planner has a map and with a partner they will determine appropriate routes for a Franklin-Murray connection. In the meeting at the offices of the town planners, they are to consider reasons for preferences and to work out individual/joint priorities on routing the freeway. They are not to feel anxious about any conflict of ideas, or feel that consensus is necessary. Role players are asked if they need further information. Students then move to enact the given situation at one and the same time. The teacher wanders among pairs of students offering help where required.

[By having everyone working at once the teacher hopes to avoid embarrassment that may arise if students have to perform for peers. Setting the role play at a point before any decision is made, enables students to see that decisions are historically sited.]

After about ten minutes, the paired activity stops and the teacher asks selected students how they progressed in their decision-making activity. There is a mixed response regarding conflict and consensus of ideas. The majority of students opt for one of three routes. These are: through a row of houses to the south of Wayville, across the marshy area, or through bushland with native trees. These routes are recorded and students quickly move on to the next part of the role play.

Using acquired information

Students are divided into groups of four or five. Each group chooses one person as town planner. The others are journalists who will interview the planner about decisions made in the previous scenario. The journalists meet before the interview and decide on appropriate questions.

The focus is on justifying and outlining criteria for the freeway route. While the journalists are evolving questions, planners clarify thoughts and consider appropriate responses. After ten minutes all parties (journalists plus planner) are asked to begin their interviews. The teacher attempts to monitor the progress of each group as they focus upon one of the three alternatives offered in the first role play.

[Planners are given the opportunity to justify their stance and, in doing so, their position becomes clearer. Journalists assist in identifying pertinent questions about the freeway.]

Critical reflection

After the allotted time, all parties gather in a circle. The teacher thanks the students for participating and makes it clear that they are now out of role. The teacher asks students to comment on: their participation as planners/journalists (responses of self/others); the selection of particular freeway routes; the criteria

influencing the selection (e.g. economical or financial reasons); the questions of the journalists; and the uses of particular knowledge. The teacher collates and records the criteria governing student selection of each route. At the very end of this first session students are invited to vote on the choices of planners. The majority vote for the demolition of Wayville homes as buildings are replacable; whereas the flora and fauna and natural habitat are not. The teacher announces that next week students will have an opportunity to examine the issue from different standpoints. The teacher draws the first session to a close.

[Students are invited to reflect critically on the decisions made and the likely motives underpinning these selections.]

Session B. Other perspectives on the problem

The teacher aims to investigate the consequences of last week's decision to demolish houses to make way for the freeway. By taking the roles of inhabitants, students have a chance to see the problem from within. They can also compare this experience with the one last week.

Into the problem.

Students are reminded of last week's decision to demolish some homes in Wayville to extend the freeway. Today the teacher asks: 'What are the implications of the proposed route for Wayville inhabitants?' The teacher reminds students of those affected by the freeway decision. The role list from last week is discussed. Students are divided into twos and select roles of those likely to be influenced by the planners' decision. Some select local shopkeepers, others choose to be unemployed with a chance of working on the freeway extension. Students are asked to consider their individual view of the issue, the meaning of the problem and their stake in the outcome of the freeway plan. Students in role write down their observations of the issue.

[Students focus on the victims of their decision, with a view to seeing that all decisions have consequences. They are asked to make the problem their own. By working in pairs, and recording joint observations in role, students render mutual support in establishing meaning.]

After twenty minutes, students are drawn into a circle with the teacher. This is the signal to come out of role.

Critical reflection

All students are invited to relate the views of those in Wayville. The teacher asks: 'What are their interests? Why do they think the way they do? How do they feel as residents? and, What say have they had in the determination of the route?' Thoughts and feelings are summarised using the chalkboard. At the same time the teacher pins up the recorded views of the planners. She then invites comments on similarities and differences among planners and residents.

Hot seating

Hot seating is a role play technique which involves students being asked questions in turn by other role players. Each is put in the hot seat and asked about their role, their stance on an issue and role relationships (e.g. mother, father etc.) with other players. The teacher groups students according to their choice of role. Thus, all shopkeepers and all residents, etc, are placed together in groups. The teacher asks that, following hot seating, group members make a collective statement about their position on freeway extension.

[Hot seating allows everyone to participate. It can also help clarify views, attitudes and values associated with each role.]

Critical reflection

Groups present their views before others who are then invited to ask questions. Group members are encouraged to comment upon the thoughts and feelings of the group when attempting to achieve collective decisions. A few state their unease at peer pressure; this is discussed. The groups are thanked for compiling their submissions. The teacher points out that next week everyone can express their views about the Wayville Freeway at a public meeting to be held at the Wayville Community Hall.

[Each group is able to compile its own submission to persuade others to their cause. Peer pressure may happen, but can be dealt with by allowing for both individual and group submissions. Students manage to identify persons most affected by the planners' decision.]

Session C. The public meeting

A public meeting is to be held in fifteen minutes to discuss the freeway extension. All interested parties will be allowed to state their case before the Government Inspector (played by the teacher) appointed to Chair the meeting. The meeting will occupy one half of the room, and the pre-discussion will be held in the remaining space. Students spend time collating ideas with similar role holders (e.g. other shopkeepers) and prepare information for the meeting. Shopkeepers, locals and other groups confer regarding their approach, motives, and arguments for the meeting. Five volunteers are selected to judge the evidence to be presented before them.

Fifteen minutes later the Government Inspector calls the meeting to order and students sit on the chairs provided. The Government Inspector thanks everyone for coming and restates the problem of the freeway extension. She hopes those present will be able to shed some light on the matter. Everyone is reminded of the rules of the meeting, that is, when to speak, and so on. The five volunteers are introduced as trainee inspectors who will advise the Inspector.

Each party, or individual, submits a viewpoint on the freeway matter. Within the agreed rules, role players are able to interject between submissions. At the end of

the hearing, the Government Inspector and trainees confer. The meeting is brought to order. The Inspector has listened to the hearing with interest, and after much deliberation with the trainees, has decided to ...

[The teacher explained beforehand about taking a role and the rules of the scenario. The trainees are randomly chosen (as with adult jurors) and asked to observe the proceedings and give their verdict on submissions. By electing a jury of students, it is possible not to have any teacher input into the decision-making process. Other teachers may decide to preside over all decisions and conclusions.]

Critical Reflection

Students' comments on the decision-making processes are made in and out of role. They are asked to remember the arguments raised in relation to environmental options. Some fundamental questions are raised by the teacher: 'How do you feel about the verdict of the trainees? Do you agree with the findings? If not, why not? What have you learned about the motives and interests of specific groups? What impact did your information have on the verdict? What issues are left unresolved?' These questions focus students' thinking. Students understand that the issue is more than a simple comparison of environmental options. Experiencing role play, they realise that decisions have implications for Wayville inhabitants, specific interest groups, and the shaping of the environment.

[This final point may provide a rich source of material for further investigation. Students may be encouraged to research newspaper stories about similar environmental problems.]

All three sessions combine to investigate the one issue from a number of different vantage points. Students have explored the problem from different positions. Emphasis has been on active involvement where students in role understand the processes of decision-making from direct experience. The second session may provide a challenge to student views experienced in the first one. That is, the decision to demolish houses to extend the freeway is put to the test and generated a further set of problems focussing on the inhabitants. Teachers may wish to begin the investigation by questioning the need for a freeway in the first place. Others may wish to develop the base model by focussing on other possible routes. It might be an idea to find out the wishes of minority groups in Franklin and Murray. Clearly, using role play opens up a wide scope for investigating environmental problems at a human level. Roles and scenarios are virtually unlimited and can be used by environmental educators in imaginative ways. Once tried, students may not be slow in making their own suggestions about which perspectives could be explored within the issues-based framework provided by the teacher.

Conclusion

There is a potentially productive relationship between role play and environmental education. Role play is useful in providing teachers of environmental education with a means of engaging students in active learning experiences, clarifying values, working in social situations, pursuing real problems, and being socially critical. The practical example given shows that role play can encompass approaches recommended by the Ministry of Education, Victoria. A major strength of role play lies in the adoption of discerning roles and scenarios which can problematise possible taken-for-granted environmental issues.

This paper may not have provided original news for teachers familiar with role play, but has offered insights into its application to environmental education. Hopefully, the paper has aroused curiosity, and allayed fears sufficiently, for role play to be adopted by environmental educators seeking additional means of fulfilling a socially critical agenda.

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