



What's My Position? Role, Frame, and Positioning When Using Process Drama

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The terms 'role', and to a lesser extent 'frame', are ubiquitous in the literature on the use of drama for educational purposes that has been described as 'process drama'. In

this article I show the significance of additionally considering how teacher and students 'position' one another when they use drama.

I favour the phrase 'using drama' over 'doing drama' when stressing the educational uses of drama. Teacher and students are not immersed in an imagined world that is separated from the everyday world but rather they interpret their imagined experiences for meaning to connect with their everyday lives and thereby develop more understanding about a facet of life.

Discussion of role and frame in the literature tends to be restricted to each participant's role and frame in an imagined situation. This article stresses that we must remember to pay attention to role, frame, and position in both the everyday world of the classroom as well as in any imagined world that is created.

Role

When participants in drama activities imagine that they are other people then they take on 'roles'. However, people also have their social roles in their everyday lives that exist in parallel with any imagined roles (Goffman, 1974). In a recent 1-day workshop that I conducted with pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, artists, and other professionals, everyone took on the role of astronauts on a space station. As the leader of the workshop, I shifted back and forth between my social roles of 'teacher' and 'professor' in the everyday world of the classroom and my imagined role of 'astronaut'. Similarly, the workshop participants shifted back and forth between their social roles and their imagined roles as we negotiated activities, experienced them, and interpreted them.

Drama practitioners often talk about being 'in role' or 'out of role'. However, from a sociological sense we are always 'in role'. We change roles as we interact with different people in different situations that can include activities in the imagined worlds of theatre, play, and drama.

More significant than whether or not we are in role is whether or not participants assume that activities are happening solely in the everyday world. We may take on an imagined role, but we actually don't need fictional roles to create drama; what we must imagine is that we are elsewhere, in an imagined world. We can begin to use drama when we start to create, experience, and interpret an imaginary world in addition to the everyday world of the classroom.

The Imagined and Everyday Worlds of Drama

Drama takes place in two worlds simultaneously. In the theatre, the audience sits in the everyday world watching an imagined world that the actors, director, and technical managers create for them. In process drama, there is no external audience to the work, so that teacher and students are the equivalent not only of theatre actors, directors, and technicians but also of a theatre audience (O'Neill, 1995). In process drama, participants use their social and cultural imagination to create a shared imagined world. The imagined world does not replace the everyday classroom world, but rather begins to be created alongside the everyday world. Teacher and students interact in both worlds

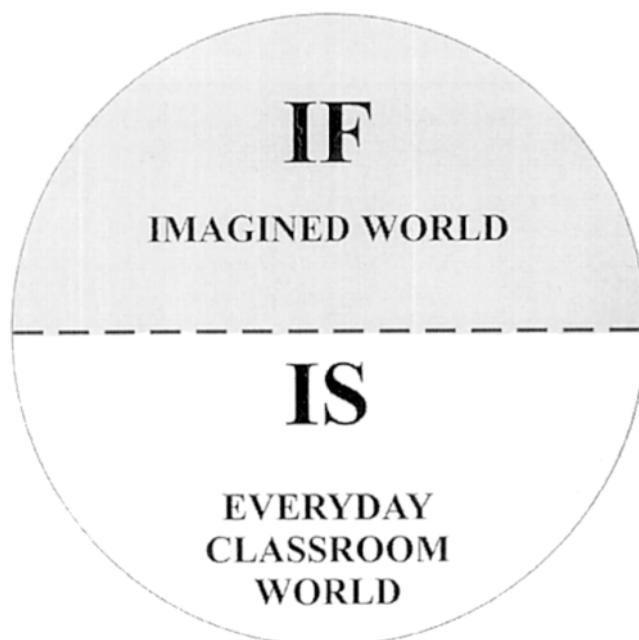


FIG. 1.

simultaneously and as necessary they move back and forth between them at will (Heathcote, 1975).

Whereas the everyday world is a 'single' reality, a drama world always has a 'doubled' reality because we experience it happening in both imagined and everyday space–times simultaneously. We can think of the everyday as the world of 'what is'. A drama world begins to exist when we additionally consider 'what if ...?' for example, what if we were astronauts? We can describe the everyday as IS whereas drama occurs in IS + IF.

One reason why the doubled reality of drama is so significant is that the social and cultural meanings that we make in one space–time affect the meanings in the other. On the one hand, for example, negotiations in the IS can determine the 'rules' in the IF. Movement in the imagined astronauts' world was controlled by the agreement that the astronauts were weightless and that they could be slowly jet-propelled. On the other hand, interactions in the IS + IF affect the classroom community that continues to develop through all classroom activities whether imagined or everyday. For example, when the participants in pairs imagined that they were working together to examine the spaceship for possible damage, they were collaborating.

Frame **Smile**
on my mat

We make sense of the world by interpreting situations through various perspectives or sociocultural 'frames' (Goffman, 1974). The 'everyday world of the classroom' is a

multi-faceted dynamic social and cultural space–time with multiple possible frameworks that teacher and students could use to interpret the world. The ‘imagined worlds’ that we create when we use drama are also space–times where students and teachers can use and explore frames normally unavailable to them everyday.

Frames Develop in Communities of Practice

People share frameworks with other people who regard themselves as members of various ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger, 1998).

Participants walk into our classrooms with existing everyday social roles and everyday frames. As they interpret events (whether in an imagined world or the everyday world), participants do so from the IS perspectives that come from their social and cultural identities or frames of reference. So do I as the teacher.

For example, as a member of the community of teachers I identify with colleagues across time and space. I identify with those who see teachers more as guides to ask questions than as providers of answers, more as co-learners in dialogue with children than as instructors giving information, and more as viewing the classroom as a space for collaborative activities than for individual accomplishments.

The social activities that occur in every classroom space over time create the discourses of a classroom community that can be considered a local culture with shared frames of reference. The students in a classroom over time create certain shared expectations and assumptions that frame how they interpret events. Actual astronauts in a space station do the same thing. However, astronauts on a space station frame activities and events from a professional and personal viewpoint that gives them very different power and authority from what most students or teachers on earth would have viewing the same events.

Social activities in imagined worlds create community and a shared frame just as everyday activities do. Activities that are collaborative practices to achieve shared goals, build a feeling of commonality and a history of shared accomplishments whether or not participants identify them as IS or IS + IF activities. For example, pretending to space walk, put on spacesuits, and explore the outside of the spaceship in teams for possible problems were the activities that began to create a community of astronauts. As a whole group we identified urgent problems: the oxygen supplies were lower than expected, tiles on the exterior of the fuselage were damaged, and the radio antenna was damaged. The participants worked together in small groups to develop plans, write notes, and present their ideas to the whole group. The group as a whole and in small groups repeatedly negotiated and agreed on imagined shared events. At a later time people could have explored, for example, how to divide up the remaining oxygen fairly, how to support one another, and how to execute a rescue mission. All these activities, whether or not they were fictional, were building community and the beginnings of a shared frame of trust, safety, collaboration, respect, and democracy.

The local culture of the classroom exists alongside and draws on the discourses of participants’ other local peer cultures, for example related to sports, popular music, or other shared interests as well as their broader cultural identities like those related to professions, race, class, gender, and national origin. Students draw on their own social

and cultural IS frames as they contribute to classroom activities including those that create the imagined IS + IF worlds of drama. For example, in our space drama work participants tapped into their own knowledge from communities as diverse as those of math teachers, amateur radio operators, and Americans who had witnessed the destruction of the Columbia space shuttle.

Framing to Share Power and Authority

One of the core reasons why as a teacher I use drama is because when we create an imagined world, we can imagine that we frame events differently so that our power and authority relationships are changed.

A long-term aim of mine as a teacher is as much as possible to share power and authority with students. I want students to have more opportunities to use words and deeds to act appropriately but in ways that are often not sanctioned in classrooms. Additionally I hope that students' sense of their personal and shared authority will become more secure and more extended while at the same time more aware of others' authority. I want a culture to develop that is more egalitarian than most students expect walking into the room.

We can use drama to assist us to build a classroom community that values everyone's developing authority through changing the power dynamics and our sense of our relative authority. IS + IF activities affect the power relationships in the IS. Thus, for example, we imagined that we were astronauts who had the power to walk in space, to collaboratively use tools to repair a spaceship, and the authority to request assistance from the space centre on earth. In doing so, participants actually moved, collaborated, and exercised more authority than they would have done sitting and talking with me leading a discussion.

Imagined activities, in conjunction with ongoing everyday activities, develop frames within imagined worlds that students can use to make sense of events in their everyday lives in and out of school. Imagining that they are astronauts, students can experience and develop a frame of competence, professionalism, and team-work that they can bring to other practices in and out of the classroom. We had only begun to create the sorts of frames that, for example, prolonged work using the Mantle of the Expert approach can develop (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995).

The Power and Authority of the Teacher Frame

As leader of the workshop I framed activities for myself simultaneously from the viewpoint of a fellow astronaut in the imagined world and from the viewpoint of the teacher in the everyday world. Whereas some of the participants could get 'lost' in their imagined role and frame, if I wanted to make educational teaching decisions I could never afford to focus only on the IF. I was always aware of being in IS + IF. As I interacted with the participants, whether or not I pretended to be an astronaut, my interventions and questions were always guided by my 'teacher frame'.

When drama activities explore conflict we need to recognise the potential social and cultural effects. I immediately shifted us from IS + IF to IS, out of the imaginary world

and into dialogue in the everyday classroom world, when I recognised a potential problem for our emerging community. One of the participants, thinking that he was being helpful, began to invent a history for the space station by blaming one of the other groups for not doing their job in checking oxygen supplies. We reflected on this possible direction for the work. I worried that with a group that had only been together for not much over an hour that feelings of negativity might undermine our budding sense of trust and emotional safety. I asked if they felt that the group knew one another well enough to move into exploring feelings of being blamed. They were in clear agreement that they were not, including the person who had made the suggestion. Instead we focused on how we could draw on one another's strengths to plan our escape if we had to abandon ship. I am certainly not suggesting that we should avoid social or cultural conflict in drama work. However, I want to emphasise that we need to be aware of consequences in the everyday classroom world for activities in the imagined world and vice versa.

Positioning

In every interaction people position one another (Harre & van Langenhove, 1999). Not only do we adopt roles in social situations and use cultural frames to interpret events we also use our power to position ourselves relative to others as having more, less, or equal authority to act and interpret events. We do this both in the everyday world of the classroom and in any imagined worlds we create when we use drama (Edmiston, 2000). We all have the power to act, using words and deeds, to do many things from dancing to shouting. We all have authority because of who we are, what we know, and what we can do. Positioning determines whose power and whose authority dominates, is silenced, or gets shared in a group.

The captain of an actual spaceship along with the other astronauts have the power to walk in space and talk to mission control as well as authority in terms of evaluating what could be dangerous activities to do in space. Some astronauts, including the captain, will be accepted as having more authority than others, for example, because of their knowledge of and ability with using specialised technical equipment. However, in addition to any authority because of prior experience, because of his rank the captain has more authority to command others or to insist that everyone's ideas are heard.

Teacher Positioning

As a teacher I use my power and authority to position students as I structure and shape activities. My teacher authority is always available to me whether or not I tell students that I am in or out of role and whether or not we interact in the everyday world of the classroom or the imagined world of the drama. For example, talking as if I am on a spaceship I can insist that people listen to one another without formally taking on the role of an officer. I signal my use of teacher authority by how I position the students. I position myself with higher authority every time I give information, pause one activity, or negotiate with the students a change in focus or content of activities, for example, from a space walk to an examination of the fuselage for possible damage. However, I

can also position myself with lower authority, for example when I said that I did not know how to test for an oxygen leak allowing a student to share her suggestions for remedial actions. Most often I position myself with broadly equal authority. Every time I wonder what 'we' should do, or what something means to 'us' I position the whole group (including myself) as facing problems together where everyone's power and authority can be valued. Every time I support a dissenting voice, or amplify an idea, I position the group to listen and dialogue to reach agreement about any new actions to be taken.

I am always on a continuum between using my power and authority *over* a group to using my power and authority *with* the group, between oppositional and parallel positioning. I may impose silence and stillness or use the energy of the group through a noisy active game, I may give directions or request ideas, I may ask questions or provide answers. One particular way of positioning is not better than another; positionings have to be evaluated over time. The question that I repeatedly ask myself is this: how effectively do our positions promote dialogue and develop community?

Repositioning Students

When the workshop participant began to blame others he seemed to be positioning himself as having more authority to evaluate activities to the extent that he could identify the cause of the problem of depleted oxygen. He had not changed role but he had shifted his IF position. There was no-one in role as a captain on our spaceship. All activities had been collaborative until that moment. I had observed that the participant had positioned others with broadly equal power and authority until with this interjection he elevated his authority relative to others. He probably felt that because he was talking in role his words were not to be taken seriously. However, as I watched the group that he singled out, I observed a stiffening in body language, a hardening of jaws and eyes, and defensive muttering. His comment seemed to be in danger of being seen as monologue to be resisted rather than an opening into productive dialogue. I intuited that they might not want to feel blamed even in play. They seemed to be positioning themselves as not to blame and positioning the speaker as not to be heard. Whereas I wanted to be open to possible new directions for the drama work, I could not allow one person to impose a particular direction unless all were in agreement.

It was because of their positioning of one another in the imagined world and my concern that we were about to move into confrontational monologue that I repositioned the students by shifting to dialogue in the everyday world. I asked them to reflect on what had just happened in the imagined world. I had to be sure before we continued that there was an IS agreement for a new tone and focus in the IS + IF world. To dialogue I positioned all members of the group with equal authority in the IS.

Positioning for Dialogue

Dialogue is not all agreement; on the contrary dialogue over time can create a dance of positioning and repositioning between and among teacher and students that ranges along the continuum between oppositional and parallel positions. Dialogue in imagined

worlds is more likely to range into more intensive oppositional positions and still remain productive. However if we do not want to undermine community overall dialogue in the IS needs to feel supportive and collaborative especially if there is intense oppositional IS + IF exchanges.

Toward the end of the workshop participants and I delved into controversial issues related to race and gender. I used the picture book *Talkin' About Bessie*, written by Nikki Grimes, which explores the early twentieth century life of Elizabeth Coleman, the first African American female to fly. Participants represented several events narrated in the text, including one where people inside and outside a stadium were waiting for her to perform aerobatics but actually witnessed her crash.

Each participant chose a role from the text (or suggested by the text) and first voiced a response to Bessie Coleman's immanent arrival. People framed the event differently ranging from an African American male journalist who was proud of her determination to a white female housewife who realised that her husband would not allow her to learn to fly. All spoke as if sharing their thoughts as they listened to the sound of her airplane. I set up the activity so that people could listen to one another but not respond. As the group listened they repeatedly were being positioned each time a person spoke.

One African American teacher's actions were particularly provocative and chilling. They focused us on a core theme from the book—the racism that Bessie Coleman had to struggle against all her life. She framed herself as if she were a white, racist man with hands on hips speaking in a cocky, confident, condescending voice. Her IS + IF actions positioned the group. 'I knew it, I knew it. No negro woman could fly', she said at the sound of the crash. 'She should have been in my house cleaning my boots.' The implications were clear—the man positioned himself as believing himself superior by positioning Bessie as worthy only to be a servant and dismissing how she had found power and authority as a black female pilot.

I wanted the group to have the opportunity to dialogue so I asked the teacher if she would mind repeating her words and movement as others listened again. 'If you could have spoken to this man', I said, 'what would you have wanted him to hear?'. I suggested that they could choose to respond from a position that was different from the one they personally would have adopted. Responses ranged along the continuum from those who agreed with the man's position to those who strongly opposed it.

'Yea, she's got no business gettin' above herself.'
 'What have you done with your life?'
 'Just because you're white doesn't make you better.'

To extend and deepen the dialogue I asked participants to consider alternative positions. Would it have made a difference if the speaker had been white or black? What consequences were possible for a speaker whose words or deeds were noticed by someone who had the power to act on their hate? We began to talk about racism, lynching, and white privilege. We concluded by wondering who had 'opened doors' in Bessie's life and if in our lives we had intentionally opened a door for someone with less power and authority than each of us had.

Conclusion

Participants do more than take on roles and adopt frames in process drama. As teacher and students interact in both the everyday world and in imagined worlds they position one another. If we are aware of how people use words and deeds to position others then we are better able to promote honest and respectful dialogue and the creation of a classroom community that is an emotionally safe space in which drama can be used to examine significant and serious topics.

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