How Rude!: Using Sociodrama in the Investigation of Bullying and Harassing Behavior and in Teaching Civility in Educational Communities

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ABSTRACT. In this article, the author explores the use of sociodrama to help educational communities investigate and deal with bullying behaviors. The contents include using trained youth auxiliaries to support the sociodramatic process; exploring parameters of bullying and harassing behaviors and creating an operational definition of bullying; communicating the community's expectations for civil behavior and the consequences of uncivil behavior; investigating the interrelationship of various sectors within the community and how each contributes to the problem and the solution; training members of the community to respond appropriately and effectively to uncivil behavior; and providing practice for dealing with conflict in civil ways. The article is based on the author's work in educational settings in the United States and in Australia.

Key words: bullying and harassing behavior, teaching civility in schools, training youth auxiliaries for sociodrama, using sociodrama with school children

WHEN THERAPISTS USE ROLE PLAYS FOR BULLYING and harassment training with young people, they can use sociodramatic techniques in their workshops. However, the training required for youth auxilaries (YAs) extends beyond that required for improvisational actors working with issue-oriented theater. At ACTINGOUT, we begin with the process of general improvisational training to develop acting skills and the ability to move quickly from one topic or character perspective to another (Cossa, Ember,

Glass, & Hazelwood, 1996). We also provide basic knowledge about a variety of content areas, while realizing that characters did not always have to be well-informed as long as the facilitator can clarify and correct any misinformation that might be offered from the character's perspective.

The crucial part of the training is to support the actors' becoming YAs focused on developing their skills in engaging and supporting the audience to become as fully involved as possible. To that end, we practice developing dramas with some of the troupe as audience members and others as the YAs, and we brainstorm ways to support the audience participants and keep the scene moving without dominating the action. The actors also learn to deal with the frustration of having a scene frozen at moments of intense affect.

Because we do not require auditions to become members of the troupe, all interested teens can participate. The only selection made by staff members is deciding which of the available YAs to cast in a given presentation, always with an eye toward balancing the use of the more and the less experienced. Our practice at ACTINGOUT is to use four YAs at most performances because that number can be easily transported, along with a facilitator, in one car. It also assures that each YA is used maximally at the presentation.

Using Youth Auxiliaries

The YAs warm the audience up to the topic(s) to be explored and to participation in the process, support audience members in becoming integrated into the action of the drama, and step out of the way and allow the audience members to become the principle role players in the drama. The facilitator or director works with the audience to develop the subject matter and character descriptions for the required roles and invites active participation from the audience. The facilitator and YAs work as a team.

In school settings, especially for a "one-shot" presentation or for the first in a series of workshops, the use of YAs is a tremendous asset to the process. Primary and elementary students generally have instant warm-up and are ready to jump in without really understanding what the content or the process is about. The YAs help contain that energy and guide it in a productive direction. With middle- and high-school youth, there is often a reluctance to become involved in the action, and having the YAs available to take on needed roles allows the entry process to occur at its own pace. Once the first audience member makes it to the playing space, others follow. Generally, smaller audiences (e.g., one class) are easier to warm up to action than are larger audiences (e.g., an entire school). In either case, the YAs provide a crucial connection between the facilitator and the audience.

An additional benefit to having YAs supporting the process is that they can be used for roles in which it might be counterproductive to have audience

members engage. In working with issues of substance abuse, for example, the role of the abuser may be an overdeveloped role for members of the audience and one for which the director does not want to support further warm-up for those participants.

That final consideration was certainly true in the project whose description follows. I had received a call from the Director of Health Services for a school district serving a major city and a number of surrounding towns in southwestern part of New Hampshire. One of the elementary schools wanted support in dealing with students' rude behavior, which had been identified by staff members as an issue of concern. That request led to the development and implementation of a project titled "HOW RUDE!"

Working at the Elementary-School Level

The project began with an ACTINGOUT theater presentation or workshop for all fourth- and fifth-grade students (the "elders" of the school), their teachers, and school administrators. The performance started with a series of brief scenes presented by the YAs in which people were treating each other uncivilly. At the end of each scene, the director invited the audience to shout out, along with the actor who had been the victim in the scene, "How rude!" This was a relatively simple way of participating in which everyone could be (and was) involved.

In the next section of the presentation, the audience was further involved as actors along with the YAs and as idea generators for minisociodramas exploring typical ways that students in those classes were mean or rude to each other and to teachers. As the scenes progressed, more students, as well as teachers, became involved, and the YAs moved into the background, offering encouragement and continuing to facilitate the process by modeling good audience behavior. Most scenes involved two to four characters. Scenes with more characters, especially those before younger audiences, are more likely to become chaotic and difficult for the audience to hear or understand.

In the accompanying discussion, participants observed that teachers were also sometimes mean to each other or to students. The teachers were able to "own" their rude behaviors. By the time the students were asked directly, "How many of you have ever bullied someone else or were mean to them in some way in this school?" students candidly responded. The warm-up to the overall project was well under way.

Over the next few weeks, all the fourth- and fifth-grade students and teachers participated in a number of workshops in which sociodrama was the instrument for exploring the types of bullying encountered in the school community and the possible reasons and causes for it. A few YAs accompanied the facilitator to each session to assist the process, but the focus was on student and teacher involvement.

Students also explored the differences between passive, aggressive, and assertive responses to bullying behavior through movement and drama. Passive responses were marked by a physical shrinking in size and movement away from the bully and by a softening or absence of voice and a giving-in to demands. Aggressive responses were marked by a physical swelling in size, movement toward the bully, being ready to fight, and raising the voice. Assertive responses were marked by maintaining a vertical position, keeping eye contact with the bully, and claiming one's own space and rights in a firm voice.

The workshops devoted a good deal of time to practicing the assertive response. During those practice sessions, the YAs took on the bully roles to avoid further role training in bullying behavior for the fourth- and fifth-graders. Often, when students were practicing assertive responses, perhaps in response to a bully who wanted to take a piece of playground equipment away from them, they slipped into the aggressive mode, noting that it was easier than being assertive. Therefore, sociodramas were created to explore the possible consequences of aggressive responses, which helped create greater awareness of the benefits of assertive responses over aggressive responses.

As the workshops were being conducted, the fourth- and fifth-graders were simultaneously in rehearsal for a school-wide assembly that they were to present to the entire school community, particularly those in kindergarten through third grade. We invited parents to witness the work that had been done and to "learn the language" so that the practiced behaviors could be reinforced at home.

The assembly presentation was similar to the one that began the project, except that the situations were geared toward younger students, and there was a section on what to do if one is being bullied or sees someone being bullied. In addition to presenting role training on how to be assertive and ideas for challenging bullying behavior, the assembly actors stressed the importance of getting adult support. During the presentation, the fourth- and fifth-grade students served as the YAs to facilitate and support the involvement of the kindergarten through third-grade students.

Although not every fourth- and fifth-grader could participate directly as an actor in the assembly, all those who wanted to were able to participate in some way because of having a number of crowd scenes and rotating principle players frequently. The older students were reminded that they had the role of modeling civil assembly behavior for the younger students.

All the older students felt involved in the creation of the assembly and were proud that they were having a chance to teach the younger students. In the weeks that followed the project, teachers reported that there was an increase in civil behavior and a decrease in rude behavior. The greatest effect reported was that victims of bullying were more likely to seek support from a teacher.

Expanding the Project

The director of Health Services was pleased with the result and was interested in a program for the entire school district that would be more than just a one-shot approach. With funding from a New Hampshire State Department of Education Safe and Drug-Free Schools grant, we at ACTINGOUT developed a project to introduce a violence prevention curriculum within all the schools in the district for kindergarten through eighth grade.

A computer search led to the Second Step Curriculum, developed by the Committee for Children in Seattle, Washington. Grossman et al. (1997) demonstrated that using the curriculum leads to decreases in aggression and increases in neutral and prosocial behavior at school for participating students. In later research, McMahon and Washburn (2003) found an increase in knowledge of social skills and empathy skills for youth who received the curriculum, with a positive relationship to lower levels of aggression reported by those students. In addition to its demonstrated effectiveness, the curriculum made extensive use of action role training and was extremely user-friendly. School administrators in New Hampshire, however, were reluctant to impose yet another curriculum on their teachers and wanted to develop the project as optional.

The shootings at Columbine High School occurred the following week, and the New Hampshire parents began asking what their school district was going to do about preventing violence in the schools. The project had a new degree of support, although it was still up to the individual school principals to determine the extent to which the curriculum would be used in their schools.

Over the next 2 years, my staff and I worked with the school district to implement the curriculum, which is divided into the following three segments: Empathy Building, Anger Management, and Problem Solving. It is offered at a number of levels to serve students from preschool through middle school. The core of the curriculum is sociodrama.

In the section on empathy building, students might enact scenes of various events (e.g., getting gifts at a birthday party or being told that the upcoming picnic was canceled), and their peers identify the feelings displayed. Other scenarios lead up to a climax (e.g., a best friend relating that he or she cannot go to the movies that evening), and the class predicts what the characters might be feeling.

In the section on anger management, students might enact scenes of situations that often lead to anger (e.g., pushing in line or not sharing equipment on the playground) and then practice various techniques for calming down, such as counting to ten or taking deep breaths. Posters with suggestions for dealing with anger are generally posted throughout the school.

In the section on problem solving, students practice skills for resolving conflict in civil ways. In a situation such as several people wanting to use the

same game during recess, students learn to identify the problem, come up with possible solutions, and evaluate the solutions for safety, fairness, and effectiveness.

Although we saw the curriculum as user-friendly, many teachers were reluctant to take on the task of conducting role-play activities in the classroom because of lack of experience and confidence. My staff and I worked with teachers to develop their directing and facilitation skills. The curriculum is designed in such a way that the teachers and students develop their role-playing skills as they move from simple units to more complex ones. With the technical assistance provided by our staff, the teachers quickly gained in skill and confidence.

To teach the use of sociodrama in a classroom, it is important that the instructor makes it simple and progressive. Teachers generally possess the skills and experience necessary to facilitate a sociodrama; they just may not know it. It was fascinating to watch teachers and students become engaged with the process. One teacher, who had been skeptical the first year and insisted she did not have the specialized skills to conduct the lessons, stated offhandedly during a training session the following year with new teachers, "Oh, it's really easy. You'll love it."

Second Step continues to be an integral part of the curriculum for the schools within that school district, and a number of neighboring districts have incorporated the curriculum as well.

Sociodrama at a Private School

Not long after the elementary school project was underway, I received a call from a counselor at a nearby private high school. A recent event had staff members in a quandary. A young woman had come forward and brought charges of sexual harassment against a fellow student who, with due process, was suspended from school. The suspended student had been quite popular, and the student body reacted by ostracizing the young woman. This was a job for ACTINGOUT!

We began our presentation with a series of short scenes to warm the audience up to the topic and to the idea of entering into action. Having high-school aged, and slightly older, YAs was an important way to help audience members connect to the action.

In the first scene, two students argued about a lost CD. The action was loud and aggressive on both sides. We asked, "Is this scene about sexual harassment?" "No," was the reply, "it is an argument. There is no sexual content, and no one is imposing his or her will on anyone else." Although the volume of the argument was attention getting, some audience members were still "playing it cool" and remaining disengaged.

In the next scene, a young woman greeted a young man with a big smile and the line, "Hey, nice butt!" He looked at her and smiled back, replying, "Thanks! Great breasts! I'd like to get to know them better." "Sounds like a fun idea," came the reply. The audience, fully engaged at this point, decided that this was not sexual harassment, despite the overt sexual content, because the exchange was mutually agreeable. Then one young woman in the front of the auditorium spoke up. "It appears mutually agreeable, but do we really know that for sure? Sometimes people go along with something because they aren't sure how to respond." So we asked the actors what was going on for them (in role). The young man admitted that he (his character) was actually kind of embarrassed by his friend's comment, but he did not want to appear uncool so he answered in kind. This realization, that harassment can be happening even if unintended and whether or not it is apparent, was an important step in the process.

We were then able to look at ways that individuals can let each other know that comments or behavior are not all right, even if intended with no malice. Various members of the audience were invited to the stage to try out different ways of responding to the initial sexual overture. The transition from performance to sociodrama was beginning. As that part of the presentation developed, the audience members were also getting the message that it is all right not to want to be sexually involved with someone or anyone at a given point in time.

The scenes continued, evolving from the comments and discussion that were occurring, and showed the range of ways in which someone can be harassed or harassing. We were creating an operational definition of sexual harassment. We were sure to include examples of homophobic slurs as well, and our definition was expanded to include unwanted talk about someone's sexual preferences, regardless of the truth or falsehood of the statement. A particularly intense discussion occurred around the use of the phrase, "That's so gay!" to indicate something that was stupid or uncool. "It's just an expression," argued one young woman, "it has nothing to do with people who actually are gay." One of our actors responded, "All right then, how about if we decide that to indicate something is not cool, we all start saying 'That's so XYZ School!'" (using the name of the school at which the presentation was taking place) "It has nothing to do with people who actually go to XYZ School!"

The audience really warmed up to the topic and was participating fully in the scenes and discussion. The YA's involvement in the dramas at that point was minimal, except to play the "harasser" roles, so as not to have the students engage in inappropriate role training.

We then developed a more complex sociodrama. The characters were a female student who was being sexually harassed, a male student who was harassing her, some friends who felt she was making a big deal out of nothing, other friends who felt she should report the incident, and a school counselor.

We first developed a character sketch for each character with suggestions from the audience that included ideas about why the characters felt and acted as they did. We used a YA as the "harasser" and one in each of the "friends" clusters to help support the scenes theatrically (if needed), but we used audience members for all the other roles. For the role of the school counselor, we enlisted one of the school counselors because we wanted to be able to demonstrate the way an actual complaint would be handled. We also made it clear to the audience that the students were playing roles developed by the group and would be expressing feelings and enacting behaviors that were not necessarily their own. Because we often had a relatively large number of players on stage at the same time, the facilitator directed certain characters to freeze as others expressed opinions or soliloquized to hear the inner thoughts of specific characters.

The action began with a few short scenes of the actual harassment that displayed the students' understanding of the principles of harassment. The young woman was clear in letting the young man know that his behavior was unacceptable and asked him to stop. He would not. Although the YA playing the harasser was doing his role more in a teasing than threatening manner, a soliloquy by the young woman allowed the audience to see that she was feeling extremely threatened and upset by his behavior.

The next scene took place with the young woman's confiding in some friends about what had happened. The nonsupportive friends made statements such as, "He's one of the most popular and hot guys in the class. You should be flattered that he is paying attention to you!" and "Loosen up! Don't you think it is time you got laid?" The supportive friends made statements such as, "It's not all right for him to treat you like that, especially after you asked him to stop," "It's your choice if and with whom you want to be sexually involved," and "You should talk to the school counselor about this and report him." The young woman decided to follow the latter advice and went to see the counselor, accompanied by one of the supportive friends.

It was extremely important that the scene that followed be an accurate representation of the way the school and its staff handled such complaints. The young woman was told all her options and was not pressured to reveal the name of the harasser or to make the decision to bring formal charges against him. We were then able to play out several options, including having the counselor confront the young man and tell him what the consequences would be if he refused to stop the behavior. By the time the session was finished, the school community understood more clearly the policy, the process, and the consequences concerning sexual harassment.

Before the session ended, however, we were thoughtful about de-roling each of the actors publicly, especially those who played negative roles. We explained that this was the way we made sure that the actors did not carry pieces of their roles with them out of the auditorium or that audience mem-

bers did not continue to see them in the roles they had played. We heard later from the counselor that the young woman whose situation had prompted the initial call was no longer being put down by her classmates.

Working With Staff Members of Training and Further Educational Sites in Rural Victoria

In September 2004, I had the opportunity to develop and present a series of workshops for the staffs from four Training and Further Education (TAFE) sites in rural Victoria, Australia. A TAFE is similar to what is called a vocational–technical college in the United States and generally serves adult learners. In recent years, because of changes in the vocational programs offered at the high school level in Victoria, the TAFEs have seen an influx of younger students, aged 15 to 19 years. With younger students has come an increase in visible incidents of bullying that not only upset the learning environment but also resulted in the withdrawal of young students from the program.

My communication was with the staff members from student services, who customarily dealt with those kinds of issues. It was their opinion that the teaching staff often did not respond to bullying incidents because they felt it was "up to the kids to work it out for themselves." There was a clear policy and procedures document on sexual harassment, and it was well enforced. It appeared, however, that there was no policy to deal with harassment that was not of a sexual nature, such as bullying.

It was interesting that as the project was underway, we discovered that there was a policy and procedures document on workplace bullying, which came under the regulations for occupational health and safety. Members of the staff were unaware of the document's existence or, if they knew about it, did not realize that it applied to student behavior as well as staff behavior.

The project began with a training session for counseling services staff members, who would be assisting me during the staff-training workshops. They were serving a similar role function as my Youth Auxiliaries, and I called each a Trained Auxiliary (TA).

A portion of the training was focused on clarifying for the TAs the structure for the workshops, and for me, the different personalities of each of the four TAFEs involved. The greater portion, however, was spent in giving the counseling staffers the opportunity to practice role playing and to become bullies, victims, and TAFE staff members in many different situations. That allowed them to warm up to the roles they would be called on to initiate (as the goal would be to get workshop participants to move into these roles) as well as to discover the personal inhibitions they had about treating each other, even from within role, in ways that were unkind or threatening.

As we worked through the inhibition issues, we explored the importance of warm up and de-roling and of clarifying intentions through what, in ACTINGOUT, we called our disclaimer. Although the actors may use their own names in the scenes, the ideas they express and the experiences they represent are not necessarily their own. We were ready for the workshops, which were to begin the following day.

The workshops began in a similar manner to the one on harassment, with brief vignettes, enacted by the TAs depicting various types of behavior and having the participants tease from them a list of the elements that constitute bullying behavior. The official definition of bullying contained in the TAFE Policy and Procedures document was "repeated, unreasonable behavior directed towards an employee or student, or group of employees or students that creates a risk to health and safety." (Terms were then further defined, and it was clarified that mental health and safety are included.)

One of the workshop groups came up with a slightly more user-friendly definition: "aggressive, threatening, or intimidating behavior, by an individual or group toward an individual or group, that occurs over time through verbal, physical, or emotional means that results in physical or psychological harm to others." Regardless of the definition used, watching and participating in the sociodramatic vignettes allowed the teachers to develop a clearer operational definition of the kinds of behaviors that needed to be challenged.

Another part of the workshops focused on using sociodrama in a role-training capacity to explore effective and appropriate interventions to observed bullying behavior. We were able to have some fun with that by first playing with interventions that were neither effective nor appropriate, such as walking by with a shrug and doing nothing. Then we played with interventions that might be effective but not appropriate, such as "out bullying the bully." Those scenes served as a good warm-up for participants to engage in action without having to be concerned about "getting it right." Finally, we had participants try out different strategies in a more realistic manner, and we were able to evaluate them.

Participants at one of the workshops generated the following guidelines for effective and appropriate interventions to bullying behavior.

1. Elements of effective intervention with the bully should include the following:
   - Respond immediately when you notice the behavior
   - Place yourself in proximity to both parties in a position that allows you to make eye contact with the bully but that does not put you at physical risk
   - Ask the bully to go with you to a neutral and private place (perhaps the hall outside the classroom, if that is the site) so that you can talk to them in private. (The thought here was that the bully is fueled by rein-

forcement from onlookers and will often escalate behavior if in a place in which others can see him or her. Removal from the scene, however, may not always be possible.)
- Be thoughtful and conscious about physical contact
- Use "Voice of Authority," which is firm but calm
- Label and affirm that the behavior you witnessed was bullying
- Do not get caught into the reasons for the behavior—just reaffirm that it is not acceptable. (If the issue is legitimate, you offer conflict resolution support at a later time if needed.)
- Acknowledge and affirm the bully's feelings and emotional state, while reinforcing that bullying behavior is not an acceptable response
- Give consequences for such behavior if it continues
- Ask the bully to take a few minutes to cool down before returning to classroom
- Go back and offer support to the victim

2. Elements of effective support for the victim should include the following:
   - A genuine offer of direct support and/or referral to student services
   - Acknowledgement and labeling of the problem
   - Work out a plan if future support is needed; for example, a signal to indicate the need for help
   - Possible assertiveness training

The fact that the participants generated the lists in action by the participants gives the elements greater practical value than a set of instructions provided by the workshop facilitators. The instructions are also more likely to be remembered because participants had the chance to witness and participate in the role plays from which they were generated.

Another way that we used sociodrama, in its most conventional sense, in those workshops was in exploring the system within which the bullying occurs. Four key roles were identified by the participants: the bully, the victim, the administrator, and the teacher. The group divided up according to the role to which they were most warmed and created a chart of "things that are true for this role." After the group shared their charts, the drama began.

I chose one of my favorite formats for the exploration, "The Talk Show" (much more "Jerry Springer" than "Oprah"), and set things up. I assumed the host role and welcomed my four guests to the show. One member from each subgroup had volunteered to initiate the role, and everyone else knew that they could "tag into" a role at any point. Participants completely very warmed up at this point and moved into roles quickly; the victim wasted no time in moving her chair to the opposite end of the panel from the bully. After chatting with my "guests" for a bit, I told them that today's audience was composed entirely of people who had been victimized by bullies while at TAFE and

opened the program up to audience questions and comments, after securing a commitment that no one would throw furniture or engage in violent physical activity on the show. The drama took on a life of its own at that point, and I had little need to facilitate.

After a time, I used a favorite trick within this format and told the guests that they had each been given a delayed-acting truth serum before the show and that it was kicking in about now. Answers to questions and comments from that point on had to be the absolute truth. That brought the drama to a deeper level for each of the characters as they explored the motivations for their actions.

When we concluded the four workshops, we prepared a report to be shared with the participants and their respective communities. It included an operational definition of bullying behavior, thoughts on how to identify bullies and victims when one does not see the behavior happen, effective strategies for countering bullying when one sees it, reflections on the TAFE system within which the bullying occurs, and the next steps to be taken to deal with the problems caused by bullying within the TAFE communities.

Now that the project is completed, the Student Services Unit plans to keep using the format that we developed for this project for future training on a yearly basis to keep staff members refreshed and also to train new personnel.

Summary and Conclusions

Sociodrama is an exciting and effective tool for dealing with issues of bullying and harassment within educational communities. Trained auxiliaries can support the therapist's use of sociodrama within groups unfamiliar with exploring issues in action. Training young people to work in that capacity with peers helps create a stronger program, while also providing social skills training to the auxiliaries.

Sociodrama engages community members of all ages and offers a process for examining social issues that is nonjudgmental, easily implemented, and, most of all, fun. It can help clarify definitions of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and inform the community of the range of consequences for noncivil behaviors. It also provides a process for stepping back and looking at issues more objectively, which can be difficult when one is trying to deal with issues as they occur in the educational community. This process can be especially helpful when used as a tool for writing policies and procedures.

Although researchers have found that outcomes-based prevention programs are effective for practicing positive behaviors, educators whose training and experience do not include facilitation of role play may be reluctant to engage in the process. Developing programs that invite participation, rather than demand it, and provide adequate technical assistance can help the most reluc-

tant teacher or administrator to become an efficient sociodramatist and to discover the effectiveness and the delight of working in action.

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