

Role Playing and Ethics Instruction

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Ethical decision-making is a cognitive skill that requires knowledge about ethical principles, understanding of ethical issues, and an appreciation for traditional and current philosophical thought. Ethical decision-making is also a psychodynamic process that involves motivations, perceptions, eccentricities, and opinions. When placed in an actual practice setting, the facts, which are crucial to sound ethical decision-making, must be considered in relation to power structures, personalities, context, and time pressures. Thus, learning about ethics has little value unless supplemented with the opportunity to practice "doing" ethics. Doing ethics in the classroom must involve more than reading, discussion, and listening to lectures. All of these teaching methods are appropriate for imparting information and teaching evaluation skills, but are generally organized around content rather than process. As with traditional normative models of decision-making, lecture and other didactic methods encourage intellectualizing instead of experiencing.

Role playing offers a unique type of learning that allows the participant to practice and experience what it is like to make ethical decisions in a relatively safe environment under competent supervision. As a teaching methodology, role playing can be used to:

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Delineate a problem—which requires that students develop the skill of distinguishing ethical problems from other types of problems (legal, managerial) encountered in clinical practice.

Develop empathy—which helps students to involve themselves in the affective as well as the cognitive aspects of ethics through exploration of specific roles in delineated situations. For example, how would it feel to work with a colleague whom you suspected was abusing controlled substances? How do feelings like anger, pity, and disgust affect the decision-making process?

Stimulate communication—between students and between students and instructors. The emphasis in role playing is on skills in resolving—and perhaps preventing—problems. The role-playing method differs from the textbook and lecture approaches that emphasize determining the “right” answer. Role playing avoids giving the “right” answer and involves the participants in looking for various and better answers.

Create awareness of the need for skills—as students are confronted with situations (how to honestly answer a patient’s question without compromising a physician’s reputation, for example), the need for specific skills (such as active listening) or a good grasp of ethics terminology becomes apparent.

Teach elements of problem solving—when first confronted with an ethical problem, students tend to make snap judgments. As the instructor encourages the possibility of alternative proposals for the resolution of the problem, the complexity of the problem is revealed, the need for alternative thinking becomes evident, and analysis of consequences can be actively pursued.

Develop awareness of opposing views—the fact that a group of persons with similar backgrounds and aspirations disagree in matters of ethical conduct often comes as a surprise to students. Role playing graphically represents how the same set of circumstances can be perceived differently.

Of all of the instructional strategies available to instructors, role playing is probably the least used. One reason that role playing is not used is that it is a very powerful tool. Instructors may be reluctant to relinquish control over the learning process which is required with role playing. Instructors

may also be frightened by the release of emotions that often accompanies role playing. However, once the instructor understands how to structure and facilitate role playing, its risks will be diminished. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the history and purpose of role playing, describe the structure of a role-play exercise, and apply role playing to ethics instruction in pharmacy education. The underlying purpose of this chapter is to familiarize pharmacy faculty with this intriguing and challenging learning tool so that role playing becomes a permanent part of their educational repertoire.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROLE PLAY AS A TEACHING TOOL

The technique of role playing is an outgrowth of the work of J. L. Moreno whose writings present the rationale for and methods of role playing (1-2). Initially, role playing was developed for emotionally disturbed patients to give insight into their relationships with others. Moreno maintained that emotional problems could be corrected if individuals were given the opportunity to act out troubling situations and practice new solutions in a safe environment.

While originally developed as a psychotherapy technique, role playing began to be used for training purposes and has been adapted for use in classroom teaching. The technique is recognized and accepted as a training method in interpersonal relationships and can be modified and extended in a variety of ways to suit specific purposes.

THE PURPOSES OF ROLE PLAY

To use role playing most effectively for teaching ethics and ethical decision-making, one must be aware of the purposes for which role playing is especially helpful. Some of these purposes are described in this section.

To Demonstrate the Difference Between Thinking and Doing

Most of us think, feel, and act at the same time. Additionally, we may think one thing, feel another, and do a third. "While role playing, students think, feel, and act simultaneously as they are completely involved in the situation. As a result, cognition, affect, and psychomotor skills are being demonstrated simultaneously" (3), p. 96). When we only emphasize thinking and evaluative skills, it is easy to mistake the map for the territory.

To Understand Behavior Is Caused

When students explore the consequences of choices or alternatives they have suggested through role playing, they can more easily see causal relationships. Even college students can have difficulty with the idea that behavior is caused and that actions necessarily lead to consequences. In the discussions that follow the role play exercise, there is opportunity, under the guidance of the instructor, for the students to explore such questions as, "Why did he behave that way?" or "Why do physicians (or pharmacists, nurses, patients) feel this way?" In such analyses, students can begin to see problems from the perspectives of the various individuals involved and become sensitive to why individuals might respond the way they do.

Through role playing, students can be helped to see that 1) behavior is caused, 2) it occurs in a setting or context that influences the outcome, and 3) behavior is not usually wholly "good" or wholly "bad" (4), p. 23).

To Develop Sensitivity to the Perspectives/Feelings of Others

Ethical dilemmas are by their very nature emotional and complex. Role playing destroys any smug generalizations one might have about right vs. wrong answers, the best way of managing difficult patients, the attitude of pharmacists about mail-order drugs, and many other issues. As students interact with each other in a role-play exercise, they begin to step out of their own shoes and feel what its like to see things from the perspectives of their peers.

To Explore Roles

Most ethical responsibilities are role-specific. Our obligations spring from the various roles we play in everyday life and our relationships with others. As we mature, the range of our roles becomes more complex and varied. Pharmacy students are struggling with the role of student and their emerging role as a pharmacist. Students need the opportunity to practice the many roles which they will assume in the process of becoming a pharmacist and a member of the health-care team. They also need to explore different types of behavior and what is appropriate for different situations.

The combination of personality and role equals a reaction. Students can try on roles and experiment with the results. For example, students can practice roles they would like to acquire such as being the leader in the

group. By playing roles with a high degree of authority (or, conversely, vulnerability) the students become aware of the demands and constraints of the roles of others. Students can also benefit from seeing and hearing the responses others have to their behavior in various roles.

To Help Clarify Values for Decision-Making

As students participate in role playing, they have the opportunity to propose their own ways of resolving ethical problems. Often the alternatives proposed are spontaneous and reflect unconsciously held values. In the discussion that follows a role-play exercise, the instructor and the student's peers may help enlighten the student about the values that underlie his or her choices. Different value systems can lead to different types of resolutions to the same ethical problem. For example, students should be encouraged to explore the values that support an expedient action as opposed to taking the long view in resolving a problem. Students may also unconsciously attribute their own values, motivations, and beliefs to others. Because of projection, everyone—including the instructor—has the tendency to generalize his or her own personal values to others. It is useful to point out when projection has occurred in a role-play exercise and to discuss the different values held by members of the class.

To Teach Problem Solving Behavior at the Action Level

Rather than resolve problems intellectually, the students can resolve them in a context that closely approximates reality. Ethical problems are more ambiguous than the concrete, material problems students encounter in a calculations or medicinal chemistry class. The unpredictability of human behavior and emotional nature of ethical problems adds to the complexity.

Active problem-solving involves an appreciation of the effect of setting, group dynamics, and emotions on the process. Students can suggest a particular resolution to a problem and then literally play it out and see what happens to the parties involved. Often students find that what they intend may not actually happen due to feelings and internal conflicts of which they were unaware until they became involved in active problem-solving.

To Confront Typical Ways Used to Solve Problems

Students need assistance in developing skills that will help them deal with ethical problems in their professional practice. As was mentioned

previously, students may have a tendency to make expedient decisions and hope that everything turns out for the best. In the safe environment of a role-play exercise, students can learn that sometimes the expedient answer is the weakest choice, sometimes we just don't know what to do, and sometimes old behaviors do not serve us well. It is also possible for students to identify when a fallacy is being used to justify a position during a role-play exercise. When role-play participants use emotional or other illogical arguments, the instructor can bring this to the students' attention, ask them to identify the kind of fallacy being used (such as appealing to traditional wisdom, i.e., "We've always done it this way, so it must be right," or jumping to a hasty conclusion) and ask for suggestions for better arguments. With practice, students learn to tolerate the inherent ambiguity of ethical problems and the plurality of views regarding resolution. Eventually, students can even learn to tolerate ambiguity regarding ethical problems.

THE ROLE OF THE INSTRUCTOR

The instructor who wishes to utilize the role-play technique in the classroom does not require any extensive training. However, the good facilitator of a role-play exercise is an "open" rather than a "closed" type of person who is flexible and comfortable with the process. The instructor must be able to see the big picture which involves an attention to detail as well as overall themes that develop from the interactions of the players. The instructor must have the capacity to straighten out problems and redirect the flow of the role-play exercise when the players become entangled. Above all, the instructor must be a sincere coparticipant in the process. The students will sense if the instructor is merely a detached observer. This is particularly important in ethics instruction so that students do not view the instructor as an external moral authority to whom they can turn for the correct answer.

On a more practical note, the instructor is responsible for the selection of the problems to be explored in the role-play exercise. The instructor also describes the setting, chooses the method (multiple or single role play) and the players, decides when to stop the process, and leads the discussion. Though it appears that it is the instructor's job to decide the lesson to be learned, it is more likely that the instructor will set up the circumstances that will allow learning. Students create personally relevant activity from the role play.

The particular purpose of the role-play exercise will determine the procedure that the instructor will follow. For example, if the major purpose

of the exercise is problem solving, the instructor may focus on both the feelings of the participants and the alternatives offered by the students. In this case, the instructor may spend more time clarifying the problem, soliciting alternatives, and discussing the consequences of selected alternatives.

Generally, a role-play exercise includes activities in four general areas: notation, ensemble, improvisation, and closure (5). Each of these areas will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

CONDUCTING A ROLE PLAY EXERCISE

Notation

Notation refers to the structure, constraints, and physical limitations of the role-play exercise. The genesis for a role-play exercise can be as simple as a problem identified during a lecture such as: how would you respond to questions from a patient regarding the qualifications of a physician whom you feel is incompetent? Students can quickly take on the roles of pharmacist and patient and try out several scenarios with a minimum of preparation or background information.

Using case studies to set the stage for a role-play exercise is a less spontaneous, but highly effective method. Cases should be chosen that illustrate a broad range of ethical problems and that highlight the methods and principles for dealing with the problem. The cases can be drawn from actual practice and fictionalized enough to protect the confidentiality of the real-life participants. An additional factor in selecting cases is the interest value of the case and the kind of challenge it offers. Role playing may be boring if the case used lacks conflict and variety.

The case should reproduce the conditions of a realistic practice dilemma with a minimum of detail. If the case will be the only catalyst for the role-play exercise, it should bring the group to a climax or crisis situation that forces a decision. This technique encourages the players in the role play exercise to act as themselves and experience motivations and feelings similar to those experienced in real life rather than acting. The following case study illustrates the appropriate detail and content that should be included.

A Case of Suspected Substance Abuse

You have worked with John Jenkins for the last four months at a busy community pharmacy. You have noticed since John went

through a stormy divorce two months ago that he has been behaving very erratically. He doesn't work as quickly and efficiently as the rest of the pharmacists. You know for certain that he made errors on at least four prescriptions in the last week. You corrected the first three errors without comment. However, error number four causes you to confront John. John replies, "Everyone makes mistakes—even you. I'm just depressed and shaken up by the divorce. I'm taking some medication so maybe I'm not functioning 100%. Please don't tell. I promise it won't happen again." You agree to keep quiet for the time being.

Two weeks later, you notice John appears more depressed than the last time you spoke to him about his behavior. He sometimes sits down on a stool in the corner and falls asleep. Other coworkers have noticed his inaccuracies and his strange behavior. Your supervisor approaches you and states, "John comes to work looking like he hasn't changed his clothes from the day before. He seems to fluctuate from being listless to irritable. Do you know what's wrong with him?" You wonder what is the morally correct action in this case.

Case studies, such as this, can be followed by "value scripts" or "role sheets" which summarize the view of the role and provide opinions or concerns held by the role. The following are two value scripts for the "Case of Suspected Substance Abuse" cited previously:

Value Script: Arnold, Newly Licensed Pharmacist

You have become friends with John, the pharmacist whom you suspect is abusing tranquilizers, alcohol, or both. He is the only one in the pharmacy who has made you feel welcome since you were hired. Also, he confided in you about how difficult his divorce has been. You understand the stress he has been under since you recently broke up with your girlfriend. You made the promise to keep quiet initially because of your friendship with John.

Value Script: John, Suspected Substance Abuser

You have worked at this inpatient pharmacy for fifteen years. You know that you have been using scotch and tranquilizers to ease the pain of your divorce, but you are almost certain it has not affected your performance on the job. After all, you never take anything while you're working.

The students can use the value scripts for background information or create their own. They should be encouraged to “fill in the gaps” with their own reactions to the case and questions.

The notation for an exercise also includes a delineation of the roles or players involved. It is helpful for the students to identify the roles by responsibility such as supervisor or coworker. It is not necessary to name the characters, but naming the principal players does make the case easier to read. The students should be reminded that remembering the names of the other players in the role-play exercise is not essential. If the students slip into calling each other by their own names, no harm is done. The focus should be on the interactions that occur, not the ability to memorize a part.

Ensemble

Once the role-play exercise purpose and topic is selected, the next step is to provide an opportunity for a warm-up activity. This sets the climate for the role play to follow. The instructor can solicit the involvement of the class by asking open-ended questions such as, “What do you think will happen next?” or “What should happen next?” The instructor can then move to questions such as, “How does _____ feel right now?” or “What is _____ really asking?” Such questions call for responses that help the instructor select those students who identify with the roles.

After completion of the warm-up activity, the next step is to select the players. There are two types of role-play procedures, multiple and single-group, which impact how players are selected. When the multiple role-playing procedure is used, the entire audience breaks into small groups to match the number of players needed in the exercise. All groups role play simultaneously. The advantages to multiple role-playing are as follows: 1) it maximizes opportunities for students to try out new attitudes and behaviors; 2) it provides data from each of several groups so that comparison of results can be made. Differences in outcome result from variations in group interactions; and 3) it is a markedly effective way to involve all members of an audience in a problem. Since everyone is involved, no one has to worry about being individually observed (6), p. 8).

Single-group role play is preferable for advanced groups and sensitivity training. Since the procedure involves only one group, other members of the class can participate as observers. The instructor should select those students who participate actively in the warm-up activity or who volunteer for a single-group role play.

The participants in the single-group role play should then set the scene for the exercise. Most often this involves arranging the limited furniture in most classrooms: chairs, desks, a podium. The students should be encour-

aged to mentally construct the set and use objects to represent doors, walls, and windows. After the scene is set, the problem should be reiterated to make sure that everyone is starting from the same place and the everything needed in the scene is present (literally or figuratively).

In the single-group procedure, the audience should be prepared to be participant observers. The observation is purposeful, not merely for entertainment. The observers should look for the emotions underlying the players responses, think through the solutions that are offered, and consider other alternatives.

Ensemble describes the quality of the relationship of the parts to one another. Ensemble can be good or bad. When ensemble is good, players in a role-play exercise interact with sensitive and supportive teamwork even if there is disagreement. If the ensemble is not working, the addition of another player or the use of a double (which will be described later) may improve the interaction. At times it is best to start all over with a new group of players rather than forcing a disharmonious group to struggle through.

Improvisation

The instructor helps the players to get started by asking such questions as "Where in the story/case are we starting?" or "What are the various people doing?" The players can then begin and involve each other as the enactment progresses. For example, in the "Case of Suspected Substance Abuse," the student playing Arnold may wish to talk to the supervisor alone and then talk to John. An enactment does not have to go to completion. The instructor may stop it when the players have come to a conclusion. Sometimes the instructor might want to press the players to carry out the action so that consequences become dramatically apparent.

There are several techniques the instructor can use to keep the action going. A *soliloquy* permits a player to think aloud for the audience and his or her fellow players. During a soliloquy, a player can express whatever he or she thinks is important for the class to know about his or her feelings and motivations.

Role reversal is the process by which a player steps out of his role and takes the role of another player in the scene. For example, in the "Case of Suspected Substance Abuse," the student playing Arnold might reverse roles with the student playing John. In doing so, the student could get a better idea of how John is feeling. The role reversal should be physical as well as mental or psychological; that is, the students should physically exchange places which supports the feeling of changing from one role to another and helps the audience keep the players straight. Role reversal accomplishes the following objectives: increases insight and awareness,

keeps the players loose, decreases stereotypical responses, and helps keep the facts straight.

The *doubling* technique is similar to the soliloquy technique in that the thoughts and feelings of a player are made known to the audience. In this technique, another student is selected from the audience to sit or stand behind one of the main players and portray his or her conscience. The double talks to the player he or she is working with like an imaginary conversation going on in the mind of the player. The other players in the scene must not respond to anything the double says. But everyone can hear what is going on in the player's head. When the double talks to his or her player, the other players should give them time to speak. The double is always supportive and tries to help the player. Since the technique is somewhat difficult, let us explore an example. A student playing Arnold in the "Case of Suspected Substance Abuse" and his double might have the following interaction.

Double: I'm not sure what to say to the supervisor. I don't want John to get in trouble. Maybe I can buy some time.

Arnold: Yes, that's a good idea. Then I would have a chance to talk to John and let him know that the supervisor is suspicious and he had better clean up his act.

Double: But how do I buy time? I can't lie. I know something is wrong. Yet, I promised John that I wouldn't tell.

Arnold: I did promise for the time being. I think John has not kept his end of the bargain. I could honestly tell the supervisor that John is having some personal problems that are affecting his work.

The student playing the double should be very attentive to the nonverbal clues demonstrated by the player with whom he or she is working. The double is used to help clarify the player's thoughts and motivations.

An *auxiliary* member is a player who is added to the scene after the play begins. Students may observe that another role is necessary to complete the enactment. The addition of auxiliary members should be kept to a minimum to decrease confusion.

It is also possible to incorporate *on-the-spot* interventions. For example, if a player is having difficulty being assertive with another player, the instructor may ask the group to suggest experiments that the player could try in order to come across more assertively. Someone might say "Sit forward in your chair and face the other person" or "Try repeating your statement." In an open session such as this, the students find ways to assist each other and explore behavior (7).

Another fascinating and effective role-play technique has been developed from Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (8). A performance text, much like the "Case of Suspected Substance Abuse," is developed by the students but with the emphasis on oppression. The performance text portrays "visible oppressors and a protagonist who is oppressed" (8). The scene is run through with two or three initial players. The first run through generally ends in the defeat of the protagonist. However, students from the audience take turns playing the protagonist, running the scene over and over trying different tactics to defeat the oppressor. Issues such as power, status, and the influence of organizational hierarchies on ethical decisions become obvious through this exercise. This form of role play is far richer than can be described here and the reader is encouraged to explore Theatre of the Oppressed in more detail.

The instructor should be sensitive to the process of the enactment and know when it has reached its conclusion. Each enactment is unique and moves with its own rhythm. Maue poetically describes the life of an enactment as follows:

Let this process have its beginning, middle and ending.

Beginning means to feel out the collective space, to find the mood, to let the players connect with each other, to sense what kinds of possibilities are developing.

Middle is the heart of the process.

Letting possibilities reach their maturity, allowing cycles of improvisation to grow and flourish and subside in their own ways. The middle may well contain several sections (like musical "movements") in succession—cycles of opening, maturing, and closing within a larger whole.

Ending is drawing to a close, to make sense of concluding, to suggest the wholeness of what's happened, and to depart from the space (5), p. 85).

Closure

The final and most important part of the role-play exercise is the sharing session at the conclusion of the activity. Sadly, this part of role play is often neglected. The purpose of the discussion of what happened during the role play is to allow the expression of the feelings and concern of others; it should not be allowed to turn into a critique of how well the various players performed. The instructor should end the enactment, thank the players, and then open the discussion to the class.

Students directly involved in the exercise may want to share their feel-

ings and insights first. It is especially important that the instructor allow the players to carry out their own evaluations. The observers should be encouraged to evaluate and comment on what they have seen and heard and what they have gained from the exercise once the players have had their say. The instructor should guide the students as they identify the ethical problems and principles that arose in the role-play exercise. The students may identify ethical conflicts that were not readily apparent to the instructor.

A good role play takes time to appreciate and integrate. Students will learn from the insights of their peers. The instructor should not rush this phase of the process, but give the students time to discuss their impressions. Much of the learning that takes place in role playing is personal and sometimes difficult to articulate. There is a point when talking about what happened minimizes the experience. As Rostand noted in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, "Have you not seen great gaudy hothouse flowers, barren, without fragrance? Souls are like that: forced to show all they soon become all show" (9). With experience, the instructor will develop skill in determining when the discussion has reached its end and move to summarization and closure.

The instructor should recapitulate the role-play exercise and extract the more general ethical principles, ideas, virtues, and motivations identified by the class. Closure can assist students to see the connection between previous knowledge, the present situation, and future interactions. The instructor must listen to the ideas expressed by the students and then relate them to what happened in the role play and to ethics in general. Students can also be encouraged to think about other cases that might be similar to the one enacted. For example, following the enactment of the "Case of Suspected Substance Abuse," the students could discuss how the case relates to dealing with patients whom they suspect might be a substance abuser. This process can assist the students in extracting generalizations from specifics. Closure provides the students with a feeling of accomplishment and it facilitates the transfer of learning (3).

PROBLEMS WITH ROLE PLAYING

As with any teaching methodology, role playing has its problems from the perspectives of students and instructors. Students have identified the following problems. First, students argue that role playing is "unreal" or merely acting. This may be because students believe that role responsibilities in life are freely chosen and not ascribed. The use of role playing itself can demonstrate that we are not always free to choose the part we will play in a given situation.

Second, students sometimes feel ill-equipped to play a particular role

due to lack of knowledge or experience. Because of this, it is important to use students in single-group role playing who express an interest. Also, the cases should be written at a level that take into consideration the background of the learners. Again, the instructor might point out that in real life, we are often unprepared for the roles we play and have to act on inadequate knowledge and experience (10).

Third, students may find the whole activity amusing and "silly." The first role-play exercise is the most important. The experience should be positive and purposeful. This does not mean that the exercise should be grim. The students can and should have fun with the experience. The atmosphere should be one of unconditional support and acceptance so that the students want to participate in the future.

Finally, student observers may feel left out and bored in single-group role playing. The instructor should use the techniques previously described to keep the entire class involved.

Instructors also have problems with role playing. Two of these problems have been mentioned previously: fear of losing control and dealing with emotional outbursts. The first problem can only be resolved by understanding that the whole point of role playing is to relinquish control. The group determines the learning experience. The second problem can be dealt with by sensitive observation and intervention to stop the enactment if the process becomes destructive or, in extreme, highly charged cases, violent. One method of overcoming emotional outbursts or when the students are beginning to lose their sense of proportion and are overacting is role reversal. This technique should deflect the players' attention away from the action to how the other participants are feeling.

An increasing number of pharmacy educators are aware of the need to devote a greater amount of time in the classroom to the development of the humanistic aspects of pharmaceutical care and the individual development of the student and instructor. In experienced hands, role playing provides instructors and students a method which offers valuable learning experiences. The more students become comfortable with role-playing resolutions to the ethical problems they will encounter in practice, the more they will be capable of taking on the myriad roles and responsibilities they will face in life.

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