

Using Persona Dolls in Action to address Diversion and Inclusion

Introduction

How do you, as a teacher, promote tolerance and acceptance of diversity, and challenge negative attitudes and prejudice in your classroom? In this module, we introduce you to an innovative approach that can help you to tackle these issues. Persona Dolls can be invaluable in raising difficult issues with learners in a non-threatening, fun way, while at the same time encouraging emotional literacy, inclusion, good values and good citizenship. In the process, learners' empathy, language skills, emotional literacy and problem-solving skills are developed. Working with the dolls also helps to build their self-esteem.

Persona Dolls represent children or teenagers, not babies, and are treated with respect – like friends. They represent *real people*, with individual personalities and life histories. Each doll is given a name, an age, a gender and a family set up. He or she is also given a cultural background, language or languages, abilities and perhaps disabilities and a place where he or she sleeps and lives. Likes and dislikes are attributed to the dolls in terms of food, games, activities, sports and TV programmes.

Persona Dolls can be used to address human rights and life skills issues such as:

- Health and HIV and AIDS
- Disability/ inclusion
- Racism, xenophobia, refugee issues
- Culture and faith
- Language and accent
- Social class
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Physical appearance issues
- Bullying, teasing and name-calling

Persona Dolls are being used increasingly by teachers of Life Orientation, Language and Culture and Human Rights. Parents, carers, community workers, early childhood development trainers, HIV/ Aids counselors, social workers and psychologists also find them effective.

Some teachers may think that it is odd to use dolls with Senior Phase learners, or that dolls are only for girls. Others think it is a great idea. Still others may think that Persona Dolls can solve *all* their problems. The case study below sheds some light on how Persona Dolls can be used with Grade 8 and 9 learners.

Info File: Persona Doll Training (PDT)

This non-profit organisation is based in Cape Town and works nationally in South Africa. It offers training to teachers and other adults on how to use the Persona Doll approach to foster diversity and inclusion. The organisation supports a doll-making workshop, which produces Persona Dolls and provides skills and employment to a local community group.

PDT works in preschools, primary schools, with teacher trainers in NGOs, colleges and universities, and with counselors who work with street children. Nurses use the Persona Dolls to help people living with illness and bereavement, especially in relation to HIV/ Aids. HIV and Aids carers, community motivators and home visitors also use Persona Dolls. One woman from Masiphumelele in the Western Cape said: “...*I found it very difficult to talk about Aids to people who I knew were HIV positive: but now I make eye contact with the doll and then I can speak to them.*”

Here is some feedback from people who have worked with Persona Dolls:

- “*This is a completely non threatening way to talk about real issues*”
- “*They make it easy to open up*”
- “*They are fun!*”

- *“They helped me to identify with other peoples’ experiences”*
- *“They are an excellent way to discuss human rights issues”*
- *“It was amazing how everyone worked with them, even the men!”*
- *“This approach is creative and stimulating”*
- *They are effective and non-confrontational*
- *“Some shy children are speaking now”*
- *“Now they keep asking when the doll will visit again -they are so curious!”*

Case Study

This case study was conducted in Senior phase classes in Cape Town. The learners were from a variety of cultural backgrounds – some English, some Afrikaans and some Xhosa 1st language speakers. The medium of instruction was English. The teachers had received training on how to use the dolls.

The Persona Dolls were used in Life Orientation Grade 8 and 9 Classes. A set of 10 Persona Dolls was borrowed from PDT for the case, representing a diversity of South African children, including different genders, skin colours, hair styles/ types, types of clothing and shoes, and some wearing glasses.

Here we look at one lesson in detail. The aim was to include alcohol as an issue. The teacher wanted to see what other issues, for example drugs or racism, the group would raise if they

Think about the diversity in your class, in terms of languages spoken, differences in class background/ economic situation, faith, cultural background etc

*Where can you get Dolls?
Can you make them, buy them or borrow them?*

Why are you using the dolls? What is the aim of the lesson?

were given the freedom to do so.

He brought ten dolls into the classroom, took them out of the bag, set them up sitting on two tables, in a respectful realistic way as if they were real people.

The teacher selected a Persona Doll, Phumeza, to introduce to the whole class. He had prepared her identity, and was clear what he would say to the class.

He said: "Good morning ladies and gentlemen, I have brought a visitor to see you today. Her name is Phumeza, and she's ten and a half years old. She was born in Idytywa in the Eastern Cape, and she and her family moved to Cape Town when she was three years old – so she can't really remember her life before she lived in Cape Town.

Here he referred to the doll, tilting his head to listen to her. He paused, building the suspense...Then he continued:

"Her mother has told her that they traveled by bus from Idytywa - her mother wanted to try and find work in Cape Town. They live in an informal settlement in Langa, in a shack. They have electricity. Phumeza is glad because she especially loves watching TV. They have no running water inside, and they share a toilet. There are three toilets shared by a few shacks.

What sort of personas or visitors would you introduce to your class?

How would you react if the class started laughing?

Where would you find the information about the doll's life to make the persona or 'identity' realistic? Who could you ask?

Encourage empathy – discuss the problem... how do you think that must feel? Ask about feelings: have you ever felt frightened? Angry? Helpless? Frustrated? Cross?

Problem solving: talk

Her mother's name is Olika, and her sister, Phumeza's aunt, also lives with them. Her name is Lindiwe. Lindiwe has a disability so she gets a grant, which she calls 'Mandela money'. This money helps the whole family to live. Olika tries to get domestic work. It is hard; sometimes she struggles to find work. Phumeza does have a dry place to live with a TV, and they usually have enough food for the three members of the family to eat.

Phumeza goes to school at Siseko Primary. She walks to school. There is something she said I could tell you.... Wait – let me check with her...okay, I can tell you....
...Her mother has a new boyfriend - his name is Patrick. They spend a lot of time together. They drink a lot of alcohol. Phumeza gets quite frightened of Patrick sometimes when he is drunk.

Sometimes, when Patrick sleeps over in their shack, Phumeza has to sleep on a mattress on the floor...then she gets angry...she feels so helpless...she also feels embarrassed...they all sleep together in the small space, there is no privacy for her (or her mother). It is a problem especially when she has to get dressed in the mornings.

There is another problem she said I can tell you about - remember the 3 toilets? Well, the one in the middle has no lock. Once a man tried to come in

*about options, ideas that she can try to help/ sort out her problems...or at least to talk about them
The class can offer ideas.
Accept all options - discuss which are better ideas later ...try to get a flow of ideas...don't judge - there are no right or wrong answers at this stage...*

*Ask the learners to consider further:
Do you think she has a social worker or counselor at her school?
Do you have one? Would you ask your teacher for help?*

Try to be as detailed as possible, depending on how much time you have.

Try to let all group members participate and give some ideas. Ask the learners to listen to each other. They can agree or disagree, but the group should decide on

while she was inside. Now Phumeza sometimes has to wait in a long queue for the other toilet with a lock because she wants some privacy.”

Whole Group Discussion

The teacher now asked the whole class to share in the discussion. He said, “Please talk one at a time, so we can all hear each other. Phumeza has a few problems: can we try to help her? Can you come up with some options for her to try?”

The learners suggested:

- She could take her school clothes and change in the toilet
- She could talk to her mother – ask for Patrick to leave earlier than her in the morning
- She could speak to her teacher
- She could go to a psychologist or a social worker for help

Summing up

The teacher asked the Doll which ideas she thought she would try. He asked the class, “If she talks to her mother – should she tell her how she feels? What do you think her mother will do? How will she feel?”

“If she told the teacher what was troubling her, what do you think her teacher would say?”

Small group discussion and activity

Mr. Ross then asked the class to divide

solutions.

How do you think your class would respond?

Note the groups’ responses: pick up on issues after wards. e.g. ‘She can go with her mother.’ Would it be wise for her to go with her mother?

up into small groups, consisting of 6 - 8 learners. Each group was asked to choose a visitor (a doll) to work with. They were then asked:

- The name of their visitor
- Age and gender
- Cultural background
- Language/s
- Family and who the doll lives with
- Where the doll lives: shack, house, flat, etc
- Where the doll sleeps: bed, floor mat, double bunk, alone, with someone
- Abilities/ disabilities
- Likes and dislikes: games/ food, TV programmes
- Fears
- Recent history

They then had to think about an issue that the visitor had brought to tell the class about, to get some help and support from them.

Report Backs from Groups

After about fifteen minutes of laughter, excitement, fun and participation the groups reported back as follows:

Group 1

This is Zoleka. She is 5 years old. She is deaf, Her mother died when she was three years old. Her uncle took her in. He looked after her but then he started to abuse her. **Suggestions** She should get help from her teacher.

Group 2

Meet Precious. She's 8 years old, Her main problem is her mother, who is always out. She clubs a lot and she is always out drinking.

Suggestions

She can try staying at a friend's house till her mother comes home. Or she could go with her.

Group 3

Hi, this is Siphos. He is 11 years old. He loves sport especially soccer. His family moved to Cape Town from Jo'burg. He has a brother, Tim who is 15. Tim has a drug problem.

Suggestions

He should try to get into rehab. Can Siphos tell his parents about Tim? But he will feel disloyal.

Some quotes from the group's discussion: "Do his parents know he takes drugs?"

"His brother thinks he's cool"

"It's hard to say no to drugs"

Group 4

This is Felicia, Her mother died very young Her father abuses her. She lives in Mitchell's Plain.

Suggestions

She should talk to Childline. She can tell her friends, and get help from them.

Group 5

Issues to talk about:

*'It must be hard for her to have white parents'
'What language does she speak?' What languages are spoken in our class?*

Discuss issues like:

bereavement, adoption, bi cultural families, teasing, drugs and exclusion

Issues to talk about:

Would it help or not to tell the parents? Yes and no.... There is not always an easy answer.

Pick up on issues afterwards. e.g.

"But what if she hasn't got a phone? It's not so easy" *Issues to talk about:*

<p>Hi...meet Ollie. He is 13, nearly 14. There are changes to his body and he is worried. His parents are unaware. He doesn't want to tell them because he is embarrassed.</p> <p>Suggestions He can talk to his friends or his teacher.</p> <p><u>Group 6</u> This is Ophra, 13 yrs, born in Gugulethu in Cape Town. Both her parents died in a car crash. A white family adopted her. At school they tease and insult her, so she takes drugs.</p>	<p><i>He's embarrassed, but it's normal'</i></p> <p><i>Is it easy to talk to your parents or carers about body changes? What words would you use? What would he say to his friends?</i></p>
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Reflection on the case study

Guidelines for discussions

In the case study, the learners showed empathy and respect. They listened to each other in their groups, during report backs and during the discussions.

Here are some guidelines that you could use or adapt. Ask the class if they want to add anything, and if they feel comfortable with the guidelines.

- Respect people's feelings and opinions.
- Listen actively to each other in small and big groups.
- Maintain confidentiality – sometimes very personal issues are discussed.
- Trust the group and express your feelings and ideas.

- If possible, learners can speak in their home language or language of choice, or hopefully someone in the group can translate.

The Dolls

The teacher in the case study used hand-made cloth, 70 cm tall Persona Dolls. They are realistic looking and have a powerful effect on adults and learners. These are available from PDT. But you could use any dolls, homemade or bought. Try and get a range of dolls to reflect the diversity of South African learners. They should be as realistic as possible and reflect boys and girls, a range of skin colours (light beige to dark brown), hair types and colours, plump and thin dolls etc.

They may have disabilities, for example use a wheelchair or wear glasses. You can make use of improvised props, for example, make a cardboard box wheelchair, spectacles, hearing aid casing.

The facial expressions should be fairly neutral – sometimes the visitors are happy, and sometimes they are sad or angry. This means that a doll with a huge smile would not be appropriate.

Cardboard cut-out dolls also work well. Learners can make them and colour in skin tone, hair etc. Clothes can be made from paper. Remember that hair, features, skin colour, shape etc should be as realistic as possible.

Balancing the issues

These are the issues the learners in the case study raised:

- Abuse
- Inability to choose clothes, no money to buy trendy gear, teased by friends
- Living in an informal settlement
- Love of sport e.g. swimming, dancing
- Bereavement, loss of parents, death
- Smoking
- Disability
- Drugs e.g. tik
- Hanging out with the ‘wrong crowd’

- Adoption across cultures/ ethnic groups

Many of the issues raised are heavy and difficult. It is important to remember to use the dolls to talk about happy and positive things as well as difficult issues. Try to guard against the doll always being a victim – there should be a balance of uplifting and ordinary issues and heavy ones. Uplifting stories can help build self-esteem and pride in one's community. Reinforce positive, fun activities and build an association between happiness and diversity – introduce the idea of celebrating diversity.

It is also important to build the learners' pride, even in very difficult situations. No situation is entirely negative. This is important to mention. For example, a doll representing a girl who is being abused can also be very good at dancing and have joy in this aspect of her life.

A non-threatening situation

Using the Persona Dolls in the case study made it easier to talk about the issues, e.g. the use of drugs. The learners could talk openly and not feel at risk themselves, because '*it all happened to the doll*'. Often, with very sensitive issues like HIV and Aids, learners are reluctant to talk about their experiences. In the case study, the learners were relaxed and more comfortable with difficult topics when the dolls were involved.

The issue of stereotypes

Take care to challenge negative stereotypes. For example: 'all poor people who live in shacks are black/ rich people are white'; 'gay men are pedophiles' 'only black people get Aids', 'women are weak'. These statements are not true. Build personas that challenge these myths. For example, you could have a doll that represents a sixteen-year-old HIV- positive white learner coming to visit.

Similarities and differences

When you deal with diversity, also point out the similarities. For example, if you present your doll as coming from a very poor family, and your class is better off, the doll can enjoy

soccer, and like food that your learners can identify with - for example, “she loves chips”.

Talk about feelings

Encourage learners to talk about feelings, to empathize with what is happening to the doll.

Ask questions such as: “How would you feel if that happened to you?” Help the learners develop an emotional language – awareness of one’s own and others’ feelings, conflict management and self-esteem are critically important skills to have in life.

Emotions direct our behaviour, shape our values and affect our choices. They shift our attention, drive us to action, push or pull us away from certain people, objects, actions and ideas. Emotions allow us to defend ourselves in dangerous situations, to love, grieve and protect the things we value.

How we function each day and throughout life is determined by both rational intelligence and emotional intelligence. When the two perform together smoothly and efficiently, a learner develops in emotional intelligence and intellectual ability.

The words ‘emotion’ and ‘motivation’ are closely related. In order to be strongly motivated, we have to feel strongly. We are *moved* to do things. We are more likely to learn when we are motivated. Young people who feel good about themselves are more likely to be highly motivated to learn.

Emotional literacy describes the ability to experience and manage emotions productively. This can help in dealing with conflict situations.

Daniel Goleman defines emotional intelligence as

“Knowing ones feelings and using them to make good decisions in life;

Being able to manage moods and control impulses;

Being motivated and effectively overcoming setbacks in working towards goals.”

No right or wrong answer

Encourage participation and the sharing of ideas. This builds confidence. Acknowledge all suggestions. Try to discuss unsuitable ideas constructively – don't shoot them down or criticize them and embarrass the learner. Instead, ask the class to think of what would happen. Would this solution help, or would it cause more problems? Help them to think ideas through. Talk about consequences. Talking about problems is important, even though we may not be able to solve everything. Learners need to realize that it is okay to disagree; they need to practice dealing with arguments constructively.

Think about assumptions

Is it always possible to talk to a parent/ carer or teacher – can learners always feel safe? Do we all have a friend we can talk to? The answer is no. If someone doesn't have a friend they can discuss things with, to whom can they go? What options are there? Not all schools have access to a social worker or psychologist. We need to be realistic when we offer 'solutions' to problems.

Empower learners

Never pressurize or force a learner to share or speak. Rather ask leading questions to encourage them to participate. Try to protect your learners from being 'spotlighted', embarrassed or 'put on the spot' with their own problems. (Here the dolls help by becoming the focus rather than the learner.)

Some definitions

Prejudice is an attitude or opinion formed without reason. It can be against any person, group or gender. It may be a stigma, or bias, against people who are HIV positive or who have Aids, people with disabilities, people who are black, gay people, poor people etc. It can show as treating people as 'invisible', excluding, teasing, name-calling, harassment etc.

Discrimination takes place when people are unfairly treated because of their identity - the way they look, their language, their gender,

where they live, etc. People with HIV and AIDS can also be discriminated against, or stigmatized, because of their health status.

Anti-bias is a way to challenge prejudice or bias.

Classism is prejudice against people of a social or economic group - rich, poor, living in an informal settlement, wearing the 'wrong' clothes etc.

Ableism is based on the concept of 'normality' as defined by people who are 'able bodied'. This way of thinking implies that people with disabilities are abnormal and of lesser value. The non discriminatory term is 'people with disabilities', as opposed to 'disabled people' or 'cripple'.

Black is a political term that refers to people of African, Indian, 'coloured' or Asian origin, who can experience racism and to those with Arab or Latin American backgrounds who may also experience prejudice and discrimination because of their ethnicity. It also includes adults and children who are in mixed race families.

White refers to people whose skin colour indicates European ancestry. Although they do not experience racism because of their skin colour, some people of different cultural or ethnic origin, for example, Irish and Jewish people, have experienced a long history of oppression and racial prejudice.

Race is a political category and not a biological one. Few scientists today accept that there are biological grounds for distinguishing one group of people from another.

Racism refers to the deeply rooted but groundless belief that certain 'racial' groups are biologically inferior to others. It is expressed through individual attitudes and practices as well as through institutional policies and procedures. People are disadvantaged and discriminated against because of their skin colour for example black Africans, or because of culture or ethnicity for example people from Ireland, and Jewish people.

A refugee is someone who has fled a country and been given refugee status by the government of the new country. Refugee status protects a person from being returned to her/his own country.

Sexism refers to the belief that a person's sex or gender determines her/his capabilities, behavior and status. It impoverishes men and women, boys and girls by limiting horizons and restricting choices. There is a greater awareness of women's rights today but sexism continues to influence the quality of women and girls' lives, their life chances and attitudes towards them.

Homophobia is the assumption that heterosexuality is 'normal' and 'natural' and that homosexuality is not. It includes actions and attitudes that express fear, hatred or intolerance.

Lesbian refers to intimate relationships between women.

Gay refers to intimate relationships between men.

Some people use the term **homosexual** or **gay** to cover both types of relationship.

Issues for discussion with Persona Dolls

These were some of the issues raised in the case study:

- Informal settlements
- Grants
- Moving from another place
- Single parents
- Extended family
- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Disability
- Shared toilets
- Privacy

A further list of issues that you may want to deal with might include:

- Racism
- Xenophobia: 'where we have come from' and outsider issues

- Health issues: HIV and Aids; allergies, skin problems, birth marks, scars, illness, obesity, mental health issues etc
- How we look: plump, thin, tall, short, scars, hair style, birthmarks, tattoos and piercings.
- Disability
- Gender
- Sexual orientation: gay/ straight issues
- Culture
- Faith or no faith, and religious issues
- Language/s and accent
- Social class
- Types of families: single parent, large extended, divorced, step parents, grandparents, adopted, fostered, no parents, orphaned, lesbian mother or her partner, gay father, gay siblings, street children
- Where we live
- Economic issues
- Bullying, teasing, name-calling, harassment or exclusion based on any of the above issues can be dealt with using the Persona Dolls.

How to make/ find a doll

Contact Persona Doll Training for guidelines for making a cloth doll, or to order Persona Dolls for your school. Try to find people in you local community who are good at sewing to make dolls for you to use.

Activity 1

1.Build a persona

Break the class into small groups. Each small group chooses one Persona Doll. The groups then develop personas or identities for their unique doll. They decide as a group, on the cultural background, language/s, family situation, where the doll lives, sleeps, the gender, age, name, likes and dislikes, abilities and disabilities for the doll. Each group writes down what they decide.

Once they have developed the persona, each group can choose one learner to feed back to the whole class, i.e. introduce their doll (new friend) to the class.

2. Build an issue scenario

Next, give each group a topic to develop a story around: e.g. an HIV/Aids situation, racism, culture, language, faith, gender stereotypes, gay issues, disability, type of hair, clothing issues, poverty issues, body size or shape, teasing or bullying. The 'story' is a detailed, specific account of what has happened to the doll. You can choose a topic based on your learning programme or on an issue relevant to something that needs to be addressed in your school or community.

Variations

- a) Each group can develop their own story with all groups using the same topic, or
- b) Each group chooses their own topic, as in the case study. Learners, in their groups, should write down the persona first and then the story.

Example of a story

A story can be anything that the group decides has happened to the doll. Here is one example:

“Yesterday Zoleka was playing soccer with her friends near where she lives, when a group of boys she hadn't seen before came over and told her she couldn't play on 'their' field. One said, 'your mother has got Aids. Get away from us!' Another said 'We don't want girls playing here.'”

Once the story has been decided, the discussion begins. The group thinks and discusses how Zoleka must be feeling. They should empathise and 'put themselves in her shoes'. What emotions is she feeling? Ask them to name them. For example she is upset, sad, cross, scared etc. They can share any similar feelings that they have experienced, and the situation they were in at the time.

Each learner in the group then thinks of ideas and makes suggestions about what Zoleka can do to deal with her problem.

Not all problems have solutions, but it is important to try to come up with options. All learners should have a chance to contribute and to feel that they are helping. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. Each suggestion can be discussed and explored. For example, if Zoleka's older brother came and tried to chase the boys away, what would happen then?

Role Play

The group can also role-play the story.

Using the example above, one learner could be the facilitator and the other the class, or one learner could be Zoleka, and the others can be the main role players in the issue.

Follow up

In the next lesson, the groups can discuss what happened when Zoleka went back to her school/ community and tried out their suggestions, and then report back. Written tasks can also be used.

In future lessons

Give new topics to the groups to discuss. They can use the same dolls with the same persona, or rotate the dolls to another group.

Support the learners in sharing their own experiences and feelings, by asking appropriate questions.

Additional Activity

Break the learners into small groups. Ask them what they would need to consider, and how they would deal with:

- A child in their class who has been physically abused
- A racist bullying incident
- An anti-Muslim name calling incident

Discuss these. Report back.

Where to go for help

Childline/ Safeline: 0800 05 55 55

Child Welfare: Tel: 011 331 0171 or your local area.
Child Protection Unit: 0800 11 12 13
Rape Crisis: Tel: 021 447 1467
People Opposing Women Abuse: Tel: 011 650 5050
National Education Department: Safe Schools; Gender Rights
and Disability Section: Contact your local Education
Department office.
Commission for Gender Equality: Tel: 011 403 7182
Africa Gender Institute: Tel: 021 650 2970
Triangle Project: Challenging Homophobia: Tel:021 448 3812
SA Human Rights Commission: Tel: 011 484 8300 or 021 426
22277
Centre for Conflict Resolution, UCT: Tel: 021 650 9111
Inclusive Education: Tel: 021 674 1422
Molo Songololo: Tel: 021 762 5420
Democracy Education (EISA): Tel: 011 482 5495
Early Learning Resource Unit: Anti – Bias Team: Tel: 021 762
7500
Persona Doll Training: Diversity and Inclusion: Tel:021 788
4365
National Council for the Physically Disabled: Tel: 011 726 8040
Disabled Children Action Group: Tel: 021 462 4105
National Association of People living with HIV/Aids (NAPWA):
021 24 1106
Treatment Action Campaign (TAC): National office: 021 788
3726
Alcoholics Anonymous SA: Tel: 011 341 0608
SA National Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependence: Tel:021
045 4080
NICRO: Crime prevention and re-integration: Tel:021 397 6060

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