

## USE OF DRAMA THERAPY IN CLASSROOM SETUP FOR ENHANCING SOCIAL SKILLS OF PREADOLESCENTS

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### Abstract

*Today's classroom setup is demanding, challenging, and overburdening for the teachers. Drama Therapy is a potent tool to make teaching-learning more effective in today's classroom setup. This paper explores the wide scope of Drama Therapy activities that can be used to enhance the social skills of preadolescents, especially of those who are deprived of a conducive social environment and reference groups. With the humongous amount of data influx and the strong influence of social media on today's preadolescents, it is essential to enrich the traditional teaching method by using innovative pedagogies for holistic development during this impressionable period.*

*Drama Therapy is a transdisciplinary approach that employs various techniques of theatre in order to bring about significant changes in one's personality and behaviour. In socially disturbed communities like that of Jammu & Kashmir or that of extreme geographical terrains like high altitudes, it can actually bring in a sense of stability and sound understanding of the social scenario. Drama Therapy is a type of Expressive Arts Therapy that focuses on social intelligence that is a blend of a thorough understanding of one's own self, clarity of thought, power of decision making in relationship management, and social awareness and interactions.*



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### Introduction

With the massive boom in technology, the rise of social media, and polarizing social scenarios, one's emotional and social intelligence are undergoing a significant change. On the whole, as one world, we are connected, but the truth is that one is getting distanced from one's own self and the real world.

According to Prof Howard Gardener's theory of multiple intelligence, "Social Intelligence is the ability to get along well with others and to get them to cooperate with you" (Albrecht, 2004)+. It has been well established that man is a social animal and hence, social interactions are an inevitable aspect of one's growing up. Social intelligence is how one deals with other human beings keeping in mind the social context.

Colloquially, social intelligence is known as “people skills”. When in school or a classroom setup, one is slowly steadily exploring the realms of friendship and moving out of one’s comfort zone that he/she shares with one’s family. It is essential that one gets the most conducive atmosphere so that as an adult, one can work productively and in sync with one’s social surroundings.

Expressive Arts Therapies have become the buzzword in today’s world and it is essential that we incorporate them into the complete teaching-learning process, especially in a classroom setup for preadolescents. The use of drama in counselling may involve acting out fictional scenes from books or movies or real-life scenarios and then, processing the experiences during the session. This provides children with an opportunity to be creative and express themselves in a way that may be new and different. (Smith-Adcock & Tucker, 2017). ‘Drama’ and ‘Theatre’ if incorporated correctly into the curriculum can be extremely useful to develop a child’s personality. Drama can form an important ingredient in education as well as therapeutic practices.

The North American Drama Therapy Association defines the therapy as “an active, experiential approach to facilitating change. Through storytelling, projective play, purposeful improvisation, and performance, participants are invited to rehearse desired behaviours, practice being in a relationship, expand and find flexibility between life roles, and perform the change they wish to be and see in the world.”

### **Need for this Study**

The researcher has felt the need to do this study after seeing the condition of today’s society where the knowledge boom is the order of the day. The massive scale of social disturbances around is proof enough that people are losing out on the essence of being a cohesive and productive society and their self-awareness is at an all-time low. The current practices being followed in the classroom setup are not focussed on deliberating the requisite social skills. It is essential to incorporate them into a regular classroom setup so that the adults of tomorrow are socially sound and peaceful. Preadolescents are more exposed to media than ever before and are under constant stress.

The researcher has closely seen the social climate of Jammu & Kashmir and of extremely high altitudes in the state of Sikkim. The researcher has been involved in teacher training sessions in various schools in these areas and has realized that the classroom setup lacks any innovative pedagogies and the preadolescents don’t seem to have a special character

of their own. Development is happening at a slow pace and some immediate measures need to be taken to expedite the evolution of their society.

The researcher has worked in an organization promoting drama therapy and has seen a significant difference in an individual's social skills and now wishes to integrate it with the normal teaching-learning process in the classroom setup for preadolescents. It also acts as a medium to express innermost feelings and hence, reduces stress and opens doors to divergent thinking. Drama therapy is one technique that is an effective way to connect to the students and it would surely yield the desired effect. For a better and more productive tomorrow, we must start working on an individual's stress level, adaptability, divergent thinking, modesty, and other core human values. It is easy to deduce that only when individuals will understand completely their own purpose of being, their skills, and their shortcomings, is when they can render good returns to society. Every individual's social intelligence is extremely crucial for any society to flourish as a whole.

The researcher has chosen preadolescents between 9 – 12 years as the focus group for this study as this is a crucial time when children come out of their comfort zone that he/she shares with his/her family. Here, it is essential that one gets the most conducive atmosphere so that as a grown-up adult, one can work productively and in sync with one's social surroundings. As preadolescents spend a major chunk of their time in school, it is essential that school works on increasing the social intelligence of the child.

### **Theoretical Overview**

For the given research, the researcher has taken cues from the following theories.

- **Howard Gardener** - Theory of Multiple Intelligence:
- **Karl Marx**- Theory of Social Conflict
- **Edward Thorndike** – Intelligence Theory
- **Martin Seligman** – Theory of Well Being – PERMA Model
- **Daniel Goleman** – Theory of Emotional Intelligence
- **Mayer and Salovey** - Model of Emotional Intelligence (1997)

From an overall view of all the theories combined, we can deduce that only a very strong understanding of oneself can lead to clear perceptions about oneself and also about others. Our social brain needs to be active at all times and that too in a constructive manner. One should be equipped to understand one's emotions, accept them and also change them if needed for the betterment of society. The phenomenon of 'Social

Conflict' is a permanent one and hence, social skills are of paramount importance, especially in societies that are extremely vulnerable, have negatively influencing reference groups, or extremely limiting social environments.

### **Research Questions**

1. Why is social intelligence an important tenet of the teaching-learning process?
2. What are the different problems faced by preadolescents in the state of Jammu and Kashmir?
3. What is the current status of the social intelligence of preadolescents in Jammu and Kashmir?
4. What all activities can be included in the Drama Therapy Programme to work on the social skills of preadolescents in a classroom setup?
5. How can we enrich the program to suit the needs of places that have extreme social climates?

### **Concepts**

#### **1. Drama Therapy**

Expressive Art Therapies mainly focus on “the self, involving the development of personal creativity and psychological awareness” (Landy, 1994). Drama is like a reflection of what and how we live. Life is unpredictable and there is always something that calls for a reaction that is extreme or frivolous. Anyhow, if we rehearse some situations over and over again, facing the same in real life becomes much easier. Drama Therapy can touch every individual's life in a different manner. For some, it could just be a kind of fantasy, but for some, it could be walking into the rooms of one's own personality one has never visited before.

In real life, we can easily become encased in set behavioural patterns or habitual responses; we also fall prey to limited self-perceptions and the influence of others' partial views or particular expectations of us. In the world of make-believe, these constrictions do not apply. (Emunah, 2020). Using drama therapy in a classroom helps one leap beyond the obvious and explore other possibilities of any given situation. One can really work on one's affective domain and social skills and bring about life-altering changes. When we need not abide by the set of given rules, we have the freedom to explore. It changes your perspective and leaves scope for trial and error. Social confinement and behaving in consonance with the vibes of your religion, community, state, and nation are taught to

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everyone from the time they are born. Many times, individuals cannot apply their knowledge and sensibility to differentiate between what is humanly right and wrong, and hence, we need to provide them with newer perspectives.

Unlike normal drama activities, Drama Therapy is a transdisciplinary field that employs all practices of theatre with a directional therapeutic objective. One needs to either enhance; correct, or heal oneself.

Given below are a few activities from Drama Therapy sessions that can be easily incorporated into any classroom setup for making the whole process of teaching-learning more fun and enriching.

**1.1 Sociodramas & Theatre for Virtues:** Value education is at the core of any educational process. India is soon going to become a superpower, but anyhow the moral fabric of the nation is in crisis. In a classroom, the drama therapist could create a situation where socially relevant topics could be enacted and the ends could be from different points of view. The freedom to decide the end of the short play should be left to the participants. Sociodramas are a great way to find solutions to the ongoing problems in society. There is a lot to learn from the children as they can innovate, challenge, conceptualize and also bring their ideas into practice with much more ease as compared to adults.

**1.2 Role plays and improvisational theatre:** Children learn the art of improvising starting from their toddler years. There is excitement and newness in everything children explore. The role plays could continue in a single period of the day or go up to weeks in the classroom. Playing the roles of people who come in contact with the students makes the child understand and imbibe a sense of empathy. The dignity of labour also increases and the child would not take anything for granted that he/she would have otherwise.

**1.3 Dramatize chapters to make them more interesting and innovative:** This activity is sure to attract the attention of each and every student in the classroom setup. The drama therapist can either convert the given chapter into dialogue form for better understanding or ask the students to assume roles of various things/topics/people and create a play. This helps one move out of one's comfort zone, and it is imperative that every individual must perform their bit well for everyone to understand. It actually brings in a sense of responsibility and accountability.

**1.4 JAM sessions:** Just like in life, one thing leads to the next one, and so does the flow of a JAM session. The start of every topic could kickstart with a JAM (Just-a-  
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Minute) session. Any common keywords with the topic to be taught could be listed, and then the students carry on with a chain of thoughts, interrupting one another and picking up from where they stopped their fellow classmate. This activity results in quick and divergent thinking and might add many more concepts which would help students to retain the main content better.

**1.5 Mimes and Puppetry:** These two activities are colourful, experimental, and forgiving. If you create your own puppets or write a storyline to be enacted without using any verbal inputs, it can be a time-consuming process and hence, teaches the students to be patient. Mimes help an individual become body positive and he/she needs to use his/her complete body to compensate for the missing voice. Puppetry makes one forget about everything and is an act of being mindfully involved in every aspect of storytelling.

**1.6 Psychodrama:** Practising psychodrama in a classroom could be very effective in a group of adolescents as they are on a brink of developing their self-concept. It is essential for a student to understand all aspects of his/her personality well and have a holistic idea about well-being. This technique usually delves into your past and tries to bring forth the core reason for any anxiety or fear.

**1.7 Fairytale Theatre:** This is best practiced in the primary classrooms as fairytales are all about vivid imagination and fantasies. Enacting fairytales or even converting a given topic into a fairytale can brighten a dull classroom and add a lot of energy. It is essential to practice this in order to have open-minded thinkers in the future.

## **2. Classroom Setup of Preadolescents**

The classroom setup is a multifaceted concept that is an amalgamation of social as well as academic structures. When we talk of a classroom, the main aspects to consider are the group size, the infrastructure, the emotional and social intelligence of pupils, space management, and resource utilization. Considering the given research, one of the main aspects that influence the classroom setup is the social condition outside the classroom.

The stage of preadolescence is like a building block and a bridge between younger childhood and adolescence. The children are ready to take a leap, yet look forward to the constant support of their family and peers. A child in this phase understands that just like himself/herself, even the rest of the world has its own ideas, views, and feelings. “It is crucial to provide support as older children struggle with constructing a balanced perspective of themselves and developing a healthy self-concept,” (Smith-Adcock &

Tucker, 2017). It is important to understand that they need far more inputs and positive reaffirmations to keep them going.

### 3. Social Skills

The term ‘Social Skills’ is the perfect blend of the ten life skills listed by the World Health Organization. As human beings, we all have myriad thoughts and emotions going on inside of us and the urge to communicate them to someone else too. At the same time, we need to take into consideration the perception of others, their ability to understand our point of view, and also avoid conflict. It is essential that we build healthy relationships, contribute positively to our community, make wise decisions and build as a team. Social skills are downright essential and should be taught the correct way, early on in one’s life.

#### SOCIAL SKILLS IN A NUTSHELL



### Conclusion

Effectively imparting social skills in a classroom setup of preadolescents is the answer to shape a morally upright society that knows its roots and can aim for the stars with the perfect balance. The researcher wants to scientifically establish that social skills can be taught and self-taught if one uses drama therapy in a classroom setup. After this research, the educators can skilfully utilise the newly developed Drama Therapy Programme in a classroom setup or experiment other alternative techniques in their classrooms in order to enhance their social skills and in turn enhance their learning abilities also.

This research might also open doors to the elaborate connection of emotional and social intelligence with the learning process. Students need to be socially sound in their daily lives and workplace in order to tackle day to day problems skilfully. Learning process can be enriched only after various faculties as given in the Theory of Multiple Intelligence are targeted. Drama Therapy and other Expressive Art Therapies will undoubtedly be the next big thing in the years to come.

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