

Using Persona Dolls to Support Social-Emotional Competency and Anti-Bias Education



A Guidebook to Using Persona Dolls

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What are Persona Dolls? Why use them?

“Persona dolls represent the diversity in our world.”

- Persona dolls have their own unique personality and life history
- They have a name, a family, a history, things they like and don't like.
- They have a home and often speak one or more languages.
- They have things they are good at and things that are hard for them.
- They visit the classroom with adult supervision.



Goals for Using Personal Dolls

Persona dolls...

- Provide a way for children reflect on their own experience.
- Teach social skills, conflict resolution and problem solving.
- Help children understand differences and culture.
- Help children to identify biases so they can understand what they witness and encounter in their daily lives.
- Support children through difficult times by demonstrating there are other children who have had experiences similar to theirs.
- Provide “mirrors and windows” to diversity – the mirrors help us reflect and the windows offer us new views and new thinking.

Resources

- www.amazeworks.org
- *Families All Matter Early Childhood Curriculum* by Amaze
- *Kids Like Us: Using Persona Dolls in the Classroom* by Trisha Whitney

Uses of Persona Dolls



- Dolls can be used to introduce new themes, books, or activities.
- Dolls can help deal with specific issues (new baby, nightmares, moving, bullying, differences, etc.)
- Dolls can help encourage problem-solving.
- Spontaneous teachable moments.

Taking Care of Persona Dolls – Dos and Don'ts:

1. Dolls should take on a special "persona" and are not treated like any dramatic play doll. We don't play with the doll, the doll is part of our classroom community.
2. They have a special place in the classroom, a seat at meeting area, a place at a table, on a pillow, etc. They don't get tossed up on a shelf and are always treated with respect and care.
3. Dolls always "speak" to and through a teacher. The teacher does not make up a pretend voice for the doll, rather she listens and repeats or responds with comments and questions.
4. Dolls have their own journal to record their experiences. This can be completed by the teacher, or dictated by children. This is to keep the story line consistent and the doll can have continual experiences.
5. Store the doll in a closed bag when not in use.

CREATING YOUR STORY

There are two different types of stories: starter stories and follow up stories. (See worksheets and samples on page 6-8.)

STARTER STORY - How to get started:

Hi everyone, I brought a friend to school with me today...this is my friend Nick. Nick is excited about getting to know all of you...would you like to know a little bit about Nick?

First story: Introduce doll to your group (4- 6 facts)

Name, age, who the doll lives with at home. Talk about something the doll likes to do.

“Would you like to shake Maria’s hand or give a hug? This is her first day in our program, how can we help Maria feel welcome?”

FOLLOW UP STORIES:

Second story: Tell a story about something that happened to the doll that is similar to the experiences the children may have had (new sibling, moving, fight with a friend, excluded from a game, etc.)

Third story: Tell a deeper story that deals with or introduces an anti-bias issue- Develop a story that addresses the incident or issues.

Five Steps for Using Persona Doll Stories

1. Introduce (reminders about doll)
2. Situation set up (keep it short)
3. Identify feelings (ask, don’t tell)
4. Discussion /problem-solving (ask questions to help children think about the issue)
5. Resolution (use children’s ideas)

How to Introduce the Persona Doll

- The Persona Doll sits on the lap of the teacher/educator.
- From time to time the teacher bends down to the doll, to hear what the doll wants to say to the children.
- The teacher then tells the children, using the third person, what she has heard, leads the conversation, invites the children to tell about themselves and lets them develop their thoughts. “Oh, you really like spaghetti, so do the children in this class. Who else likes spaghetti?” or “I see, so when you were outside someone said you couldn’t play in the sandbox. That must have made you feel sad.”
- The doll does not speak. Do not use a fake voice for the doll. Listen and then share what the doll has to say.
- Each doll has their own journal to keep of track of their stories



Worksheet: Developing an identity for your persona doll

Questions to think about:

- What are you hoping your group of children will learn from the doll?
- How is this doll similar to children in our group?
- How is this doll different from children in your group?
- Does your doll story reflect any stereotypes about different groups?
Do you need to modify story in any way to make sure you aren't reinforcing stereotypes?

Doll Name	
Age	
Family (who is in his or her family)	
Cultural, religious, ethnic background	
Where does doll and family live	
Favorite things to do, favorite foods	
Something I am good at	
Something I am working on	
Personality (shy, quiet, eager, curious, confident, outgoing, active, etc.)	
Other information	

Persona dolls story (SAMPLE DRAFT)

Name	Allana	Nick	Sam	Deshawn
Age	Four	four	five	six
Family	Lives with her two moms Allana was adopted into her family-	Nick lives in two places, with his mom for some of the week and with his dad for the other. He doesn't have any brothers or sisters, but has lots of cousins he likes to play with. Grandparents live in his mom's house and help take care of Nick also.	Lives in apt building with her mom and dad and older brother Mother originally from Columbia	Mom and dad and baby sister Sometimes likes having baby sister and other times does not
Ethnicity	Mixed race, Asian backgrounds, some Native American Some people make fun of her eyes and call her slanty eyes.	One thing Nicks likes about his family is that everyone has their own special skin and hair color. Nick's skin and hair are darker than his mom's and lighter than his dad's. Nick's dad is African American and his mom is European American.	Speaks Spanish and English and American sign language (Sam's brother was born with ears that don't hear very well, so he speaks American sign language with his hands)	Wears glasses (some kids make fun of his glasses and call him bug eyes) African American
Things I like to do	Loves the sensory table, playing in the doll house and singing	Loves to draw and paint	Very curious, she is always asking why	Deshawn loves to play outside and run and climb with his friends. He has great imagination and can tell interesting stories. He is really good at puzzles. Reading is hard for him.

Favorite food	Favorite food is pizza	Loves to eat, grapes and manicotti and lots of other things. Manicotti is a special noodle with cheese inside.	Sam doesn't always like to taste new foods. But she does like mac and cheese and angel hair pasta.	Favorite food is rice and beans
Things that are challenging		He gets frustrated sometimes. Doesn't like it when kids are really loud or when they mess with this stuff. Sometimes he says things he wishes he hadn't said. He 's good at apologizing though, once he calms down also He still has lots of friends.	Drawing and writing are hard for Sam	