

GUIDE TO DIAGNOSTIC ROLE PLAY

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Diagnostic Role Play: Overview

What is Diagnostic Role Play?

A Diagnostic Role Play (DRP) consists of a simulation in which participants act out the typical attitudes and behaviors of individuals in a given context, followed by an analysis by observers and participants alike of what they have just seen/heard/felt. It is a new qualitative **research method** that program planners may use to help them better understand current behaviors and design more effective strategies to promote and support the development of new, improved behaviors. As its name implies, the DRP combines the process of diagnosis, or examination and analysis, with role play.

Many health programs have used drama as an intervention through which participants model or try out new behaviors. DRP offers program planners an opportunity to learn about behaviors, both current and potential, and to use what they learn to inform the design of their interventions. This means that researchers and program managers can use DRP to help them:

- examine behaviors, spoken words, and interactions;
- understand better why people behave as they do; and
- identify feasible ways to help program participants move towards behaviors that are more favorable to their health.

Why use Diagnostic Role Play in formative research?

Unlike other research methods, DRP requires participants to do or act rather than just talk about a topic. DRP involves participants in showing, demonstrating, or portraying normal things in their lives. People in a DRP act out certain situations that showcase “normal” behavior, not necessarily their own behavior.

This role play is a stimulus for subsequent discussion among the players and the audience. One outcome of that discussion may be a second role play, one that either gives an alternative, more realistic picture of normal life, or one that presents reasonable and feasible solutions to the problem situation. The group can do a concluding exercise that summarizes key points. Some groups have done songs while others have asked volunteers to write poems.

Researchers may use the DRP to clarify or get more in-depth understanding about concepts that emerge from a review of existing information and initial in-depth interviews—normally the first research methods used.

DRP has a number of potential advantages for researchers. It allows them to see real-life situations that they may not otherwise be able to see because they are private or very rare; for example, what happens in the home when a pregnant woman or child has a medical emergency (who gets involved, what do various people say, whose opinion holds sway?). It also illustrates behaviors, including social interactions, and many of the ways people communicate that seem so normal that people may not talk about them otherwise. And because some behaviors may be sensitive, participants may be more willing to act them out and discuss them when they are not portraying themselves. Finally, options or solutions available to people can be discussed in a group using concrete examples.

Participants may also have much to gain from the DRP, because it gives them an opportunity to discuss important issues that affect them and to have input into research findings as well as their program implications. It also should be fun for participants.

How to organize a Diagnostic Role Play

Three groups are essential in a DRP:

- The participants (players and audience members)
- The research team (facilitator and note takers)
- The organizers of the DRP*

The Participants

There should be 10 to 15 participants in each group. Three to five of the participants can be *players*, while the other 10 to 12 participants have an important role as *audience members*. They must watch the performance closely and then discuss it among themselves and with the players, with guidance from the facilitator. Many of the issues and findings from the role play will come out through that discussion.

DRP will work best if the number of participants is limited. This will help guarantee that everyone is able to see and hear the role play and that each person gets an opportunity to contribute to an in-depth discussion of the performance and the issues.

The Research Team

The research team consists of a *facilitator* and two *note-takers*. The facilitator is in charge of orienting the participants as well as the note-takers before the performance and leading the discussion after it.

The note-takers are responsible for recording their observations of what has been said and done, not only during the role play but also during the discussion afterwards. They should keep notes on:

- What is said and done on stage
- What is said by audience members
- Reactions, emotions expressed, and "body language" (gestures and facial expressions) of the players "on stage"
- Reactions, emotions expressed, and "body language" (gestures and facial expressions) in the audience
- Major issues in the role play and how they were resolved.
- Whether they agree that the behavior is "normal" and different kinds of reactions/behavior that would also be normal in the same situation.

The Organizers

The organizers are responsible for carrying out the following steps:

1. Gather materials: Video camera and/or tape-recorder (optional), tapes, notebooks, paper & pens.

* These may be the same individuals as the research team; however, the responsibilities of this group are distinct and therefore will be listed separately.

2. Notify communities.
3. Invite participants (or give criteria to local collaborators to select their own participants).
4. Identify an appropriate private space where the role plays can be performed and discussed without others listening or watching.
5. Arrange a circle of chairs with the facilitator and note-takers in the circle. This will help create an informal environment to facilitate an open discussion. The players can perform in the center of the circle.
6. Arrange to have small prizes or incentives, if needed and/or appropriate.

How to prepare the Diagnostic Role Play

The Research team members will:

1. Discuss and agree upon answers to the following questions:

- What are the research objectives?
- What issues were raised during the in-depth interviews?
- What are the important socio-cultural roles, relationships, and norms (i.e., rules for what people *ought* to do and rules for what people *usually* do) related to the topic?
- What themes would be good to explore through DRP?
- Which participant groups should participate in the DRP?

2. Select themes.

- Consider several scenarios concerning concepts or behaviors that earlier research indicates are important but which are not yet completely clear to the researchers.

3. Select the participants.

- The main criterion for selection is that participants should be representative of the participant groups.
 - For example, in the case of Malawi, researchers decided to invite student groups and parent groups to conduct role plays, separately, for different topics. They included leaders and initiation counselors in the parent groups.
- Experienced actors do not need to be found. It is best to have community members who are truly 'normal' and typical.

4. Plan the logistics of the DRPs.

- Plan to give each group one and a half to two hours to perform and discuss at least two basic scenarios on a theme of interest. (If four groups can be arranged for each day, a maximum of 2 to 4 themes per day can be selected.)
- Make arrangements for a location that can be private and where participants will feel comfortable.
- Make arrangements with local persons to recruit participants who meet your criteria.

5. Create scenes for participants to act out.

- Develop your themes into fuller scenarios with one or more locations, certain types of characters, certain situations or occurrences.

- Prepare questions that may be used during the discussion to bring out important points in the role play.

How to stage the Diagnostic Role Play

- 1. Thank participants for coming and explain that together you are going to use a fun way to learn and discuss their opinions on important topics.**
- 2. Facilitate a game or other ice-breaker activity.**
- 3. Introduce the purpose of the DRP.**

Explain to the participants what diagnostic role play is and what they will be expected to do. You may wish to adapt the following example:

"This is a method of gathering input and information from participants in the (give the name of your program) program. It is done to learn what people really think and want and then to design an activity that reflects their reality. The role play will probably be entertaining, but the main point of the activity is to learn together.

What will happen during this session is that a few people who would like to act will be given a situation to act out. The players will portray a common situation in the community. On stage, they will represent their 'characters,' not themselves as individuals.

After the role play, there will be discussion about:

- *What happened during the role play*
- *Why it happened*
- *Whether participants in the audience feel this is the common reality*
- *What other reactions and behavior would also be "normal" in that situation*
- *What problems were raised by the players*
- *What participants believe can be done about the problems.*

If the audience feels that what has been presented is not accurate (is not exactly like how it really happens), the players will act out the role play again, making changes suggested by the audience members. This can be repeated until the group agrees that the role play is most like real life. But the participants and researchers should be aware that it is not uncommon to have several different reactions or behaviors that are accepted as "normal" in a given situation. It is helpful to find out as many of these alternatives as possible.

If, however, the audience feels that what has been presented IS accurate and feels that this is the only "normal" way to behave in the situation, the players will be asked to prepare and present a new role play that solves the problems identified.

Note-takers will record what is said and done so that all of the important points will be remembered. They will not write down any real names."

4. **Introduce the note-takers and their role.**
5. **Describe the role of the players.**

You may wish to use the following example:

"The players who will present the role play will use actions and words that people in your community would use in regards to a certain topic. They will not be playing themselves, but they will do their best to say and do what they think regular people in the community would if we were watching them."

6. **Describe the role of the audience members.**

You may wish to use the following example:

"The audience members should watch and listen carefully to see whether the players have portrayed what people really do and say in their community in regards to this topic. They should also try to think whether there are other, different ways that people would normally do and say in this situation. They should not show what they think of the role play or the players DURING the presentation, but should remember their comments and give them during the discussion that follows the role play."

7. **Encourage enough people to volunteer to put on the first role play (if there will be more than one).**
8. **Explain the scene/situation to the players and give them 5-10 minutes to prepare the general flow of the role play.**

You may wish to adapt the following example:

Describe the scene to the volunteers, and explain that the scene came from information the program learned through interviews with people like themselves. Give them 5 to 10 minutes to prepare. Help the actors plan what they will do, but only by giving general suggestions if needed.

Explain to the players that they can take the time to plan what characters will be in the scene and the general flow of the events in the scene. They should not plan exactly what they will say. It is better to have the players act out more or less spontaneously what comes to mind.

Remind the players that they will not be acting as themselves – they should present a normal or real scene from their community. You may encourage players to act as a person of a different age or gender if they feel comfortable doing this, as it can be more entertaining for the audience.

- ← Suggest the following to the players: speak in a loud voice; utilize body expression, movement, and gestures; try not to have more than one person speak at the same time.

- ⇐ Instruct players to discuss where the scene will take place, what characters will be in the drama, and what they will do.
- ⇐ Tell the players that they should act out normal life (what people say and do), *the whole setting*, not just the exact topic they are given.
- ⇐ Tell the players that they should perform a series of scenes.
- ⇐ Suggest that they make the scenes “interesting” by acting out what typically happens in the particular setting, regardless of whether it concerns the selected topic.
- ⇐ Remind the players that they should act out what actually happens in their community – not what they think is proper or the “correct” answers. Remind them again that they are not playing themselves, but are showing what is generally done.
- ⇐ Ask the players to make sure only one person talks at a time during the role play to ensure that the audience can hear well.
- ⇐ Request that the players introduce their characters and the scene to the audience before they start. They could choose to have a narrator who will introduce each scene before it starts.

9. **Ask a program staff person to do a fun “warm up” exercise with the audience while the players are getting ready.** (For example, with students the following have worked well: telephone game, making a human knot, and asking participants to say two true and one false thing about themselves, so the group can guess which is false.)

There could also be a game that highlights people’s powers of observation, to prepare them to observe more closely? For example, ask them about what happened during the session, e.g., who entered the room last, who spoke first, what that person first said, who spoke last (before the trainer conducting the exercise), etc. Applaud the most accurate observers to soften the competition (no prizes).

10. **After the role play, invite audience members to ask players questions about how they were feeling at key points in the role play and what they thought when they did or said certain things during the role play.** The players should answer “in character.” If there are additional questions from the facilitator, s/he should wait until the audience members have asked their questions before adding his/her own.

11. **Guide the audience members and players in a discussion about what happened and why and what else could have happened normally.** Facilitate the discussion – do not advise participants on the topic.

You may wish to use the following question guide to facilitate the discussion:

Question Guide for the 1st role play:

1. What happened in the role play?

Invite various members of the audience to tell part of the story until you get a description of the most important parts and actions.

2. What problems did the main characters have in the role play?

3. How did the characters try to overcome the problems? How successful were they?

4. Is what the characters said and did what most people around here would and do? Would everyone say and do this? Who wouldn't? Why do you think people would say or do this? If they wouldn't say or do this, what do you think is the "actors'" motivation in playing the scene the way they did?

5. Did you agree with what was said or done by any of the characters? Please say what you really feel, not what you think we want you to say! Which character(s)? Why?

6. Did you disagree with that was said or done by any of the characters? Which character(s)? Why?

7. What if you were in the situation of (insert character's name that people admire or agree with), what would you do? What do you think other people would do? What would the motivation be behind this different way of behaving?

8. How easy or difficult is it to actually do what you admire or agree with? What about it makes it easy or difficult?

9. Do you agree that this problem really happens sometimes in this community? How big of a problem is this in your opinion? How common is this?

10. Would you change anything in the role play to make it more like real life here?

[If they feel that actually something different happens with most people or many people, ask the same players or new players to act out the changes recommended.

If they can agree on a problem and agree that it is what happens in their community, continue:]

- 11. *If we can agree that this is a common problem, why do you think people do things this way?***
- 12. If the group concludes that the first DRP was not realistic (or not an accurate representation of their situation or that there are common alternative ways that the role play could unfold), another role play may be prepared and presented.** This may be repeated until the group feels that the situation has been realistically portrayed. The facilitator may use the same question guide to direct the discussion(s).
- 13. When the group concludes that the role play has accurately represented the situation, they may prepare and present a second role play – one in which the players attempt to solve the problems presented in the first role play. If so, explain that the group will follow the same steps they used for the first DRP:**
 - A number of volunteers will prepare and present the role play.
 - The note-takers will observe and make note of aspects of the role play and the audience's reactions.
 - The players and audience members will discuss the role play.
- 14. Listen carefully to participants' comments and ask them follow-up questions.** Help everyone to participate. Be certain to clarify how realistic and typical the role play was, or how feasible the proposed solutions really are.
- 15. Ask for volunteer(s) to summarize the main points of the discussion.** Depending upon local customs, this may involve creating and reading a poem, song, or saying that summarizes the session.

You may wish to use the following question guide to facilitate the discussion:

Question Guide for the 2nd role play

1. Who would behave this way instead of the way portrayed in the first role play? Do you know anyone who would behave this way?
2. Do you think the issue shown in the role plays is a problem? How is it a problem?
3. Is this something that people already do to do overcome the problem?
4. What else can be done to improve the situation?
5. Is there something that others in the community/audience can do to support them?
6. What are specific ideas to help and to motivate practical improvements?
7. What can the program and others do to help participants overcome the problem?

Roles and Responsibilities in the Diagnostic Role Play

Facilitator

The facilitator is in charge of orienting the participants as well as the note-takers before the performance and leading the discussion after it.

Note-Takers

The note-takers are responsible for recording their observations of what has been said and done, not only during the role play but also during the discussion afterwards.

Organizers

The organizers are responsible for setting up the Diagnostic Role Play – arranging for and setting up the space to hold the DRP, inviting participants and gathering materials and supplies.

Participants

The participants will be either players or audience members. As *players*, they prepare and present a role play on a topic presented to them by the facilitator. As *audience members*, they watch the role play attentively and then discuss whether it has accurately portrayed an aspect of their situation.

Program Managers

The program managers are responsible for watching and listening to the role plays, and then for participating in a debriefing discussion after the role plays on how results inform the development or adaptation of program strategy.

Guides for Note-Takers

DIAGNOSTIC ROLE PLAY

NOTE-TAKING OBSERVATION GUIDE - AUDIENCE

Situation:

Roles:

Setting:

Flow of Action	Key Words or Phrases	Key Reactions or Gestures

DIAGNOSTIC ROLE PLAY

NOTE-TAKING OBSERVATION GUIDE - STAGE

Situation:

Roles:

Setting:

Flow of Action	Key Words or Phrases	Key Reactions or Gestures

Questions for the 1st Role Play:

1. *What happened in the role play?*

Invite various members of the audience to tell part of the story until you get a description of the most important parts and actions.

2. *What problems did the main characters have in the role play?*
3. *How did the characters try to overcome the problems? How successful were they?*

Is what the characters said and did what most people around here would say and do? Please explain your opinion. If not normal, what else would they do? Are there any other ways that any of these characters could have reacted in this situation that would also be fairly common and considered "normal"? Who would react that way? Why do you think they might react that way?

4. *Did you agree with what was said or done by any of the characters? Please say what you really feel, not what you think we want you to say! Which character(s)? Why? What should they have done instead? Is there anything else they could have done?*
5. *Did you disagree with that was said or done by any of the characters? Which character(s)? Why?*
6. *What if you were in the situation of (insert character's name that people admire or agree with), what would you do?*
7. *How difficult or easy difficult is it to actually do what you admire or agree with? What makes it difficult or easy?*
7. *Do you agree that this is a problem? Do you agree that this problem really happens sometimes in this community? How big of a problem is this in your opinion? How common is this?*
8. *Would you change anything in the role play to make it more like real life here?*

If they feel that actually something different happens with most or many people, ask the **same** players or new players to act out the changes recommended. If they can agree on a problem and agree that it is what happens in their community, continue:

9. *If we can agree that this is a common problem, why do you think people do things this way?*

Ask the players or new players to act out the second role play. If many audience members feel that the first role play was not realistic or that there are other common ways of handling the problem, then the players should change the scene to make it seem more realistic or to portray different normal behavioral options. If the first role play was considered realistic and typical and the great majority of community members would probably react the same way, the players should act out a version that includes a solution to the problem presented in the first.

Questions for the 2nd (Problem-Solving) Role Play:

1. *Is this something that people already do to overcome the problem?*
 2. *What else can be done to improve the situation?*
 3. *Is there something that others in the community/audience can do to support them?*
 4. *What are specific ideas to help and to motivate practical improvements?*
 5. *What can Save the Children and others do to help participants overcome the problem?*
- *Poem (10 minutes)*

Ask participants to think about a poem that relates to what was discussed during the activity. Give them 5-10 minutes to write down the poem, then share with the group (or during the change in acts).

Role Play Scenarios – Children

Scenario 1: Resisting peer pressure (delay, stopping, in relationship)

- 1) A 14 year old girl is being teased by her friends about how they have sex. They try to convince her that she should try it, saying that she is silly and young because she has not tried and they will not chat as much with her if she does not try. The girl tries to resist the pressure. (3-5 girls)
- 2) A 15 year old boy who has never had sex decides to wait for marriage, or until he is much older. He lives in the boys' quarters with his friends and older brothers. His friends try to convince him to change his mind and get a girlfriend. (3 – 5 boys)
- 3) A 12 year old girlfriend tries to persuade her boyfriend that they need to have sex as part of their relationship. Later, his friend can join the discussion (1 girl, 2 boy(s))
- 4) A 15 year old boyfriend tries to convince his girlfriend to have sex. (2 people)

Scenario 2: How to negotiate condom use

- 1) A 12 year old girl wants to use a condom with her boyfriend every time they have sex. He does not want to. (1 girl, 1 boy)

BOYS

- 2) What happens when a 14-year-old boy pupil likes a girl? [A 14 year old boy is considering using a condom with his new girlfriend. He is not sure so talks to his friends, asks his girlfriend, and gets informed about using condoms to make a decision. (1 girl, 1 boy)]
- 3) A 15 year old girl thinks that she should use a condom with a sugar dad, and tries to convince him. Her friends try to give her advice on what to say and do. (3-4 girls, 1 boy)

Scenario 3: How to avoid transactional sex

GIRLS

- 1) What happens when a 14-year-old girl feels that she needs money? [A 14 year old girl is approached by a sugar dad, a man who earns money selling fish, at the market. The girl then talks to her friends about what she should do and why, and goes to tell the sugar dad what she decides. (3 girls, 1 boy)]
- 2) Three 15-year-old girls talk to each other about how to stop having sex to get gifts and money from older men. (3-5 girls)
- 3) A 16-year old girl is at school wearing a new dress. Her friends and classmates talk to her about how she got the dress. (3-5 girls or 3 girls and 2 boys)

Role Play Scenarios – Parents

For these scenes that focus on conversations, players should be encouraged to act out the entire setting and the discussions *over a period of time*, including how they start, and what might change between conversations.

Scenario 1: How parents can talk with their children about HIV/AIDS

- 1) Parents are asked an embarrassing question about sex by a 12-year-old child (1-2 parents, 1 child)
- 2) A parent (parents?) of a 12 year old tries to communicate with his or her child about preventing HIV/AIDS (by advising as would about being good, by asking and listening, by explaining what they want for the child and then talking) (1-2 parents, 1 boy)
- 3) A parent of an 8 year old girl tries to communicate with his or her child about delaying sexual initiation (1-2 parents, 1 girl)
- 4) A village leader counsels a parent to talk to her child about preventing HIV/AIDS by delaying sexual initiation, but the parent is not sure if that is good to do or how to try (1 leader, 1-2 parents)

Scenario 2: How parents can clarify their own values and expectations for their children

- 1) Parents in a community meeting talk about their hopes for their children and what behavior regarding sex they think is appropriate for them now (and how to help them do this). A mother is not sure what is right for her 12 year old daughter and other community members help her think about her own values. (1 mother and 4 community members)

Scenario 3: When someone teaches condoms to young children

- 1) A 10 year old child comes home from school and tells her mother that her teacher taught them about condoms at school today, to help them delay sex and know about safer sex. The mother then goes to her friends to discuss. (1 girl, 1 mother, 3 mothers' friends)

Scenario 4: How girls can avoid transactional sex

- 1) A mother and father learn from a neighbor that their 14 year old daughter had sex with an older man last night. (1 mother, 1 father, 1 neighbor)

Scenario 5: How girls can avoid risky situations

- 1) A mother sends a 14 year old girl to the market late in the afternoon. The father asks her not to go because she will arrive home after dark, and tries to convince the mother to change her mind. (1 mother, 1 father, 1 girl)