

Suggestions for using Persona Dolls and how to link them to RE

What is a Persona Doll?

- A Persona doll is a 'child visitor' to the setting usually at circle time.
- Persona dolls are not like the 'baby dollies' that are to be found in the role play area for example.
- Persona dolls have a story to tell to the children.
- Persona dolls are friends with whom the children in the setting can bond.
- Persona dolls can help children to explore a range of big issues such as prejudice, discrimination and racism in a non-threatening way.
- Persona dolls can help with a resolution to a problem encountered by the children and practitioners in a setting.
- Persona dolls also help children celebrate positive events for example, birthdays, weddings, festivals, new baby and moving to a new home.

What does a Persona doll look like?

- A Persona doll could be any doll from a rigid plastic doll to a soft bodied rag doll.
- A child sized soft bodied doll is best as it can sit on the practitioner's lap when it visits. These dolls are easy to handle and do resemble a child when seated with the practitioner.
- It is not a puppet and does not have its own voice. The practitioner does not become a ventriloquist.
- The practitioner speaks on behalf of the doll to the children.
- Soft bodied Persona dolls can be purchased with a range of skin tones, eye and hair colours and in both genders.

Creating the life history or Persona of the doll

- Before the Persona doll visits the practitioners will need to build a life history script which they must keep to.
- If any new information about the doll is used it must be added to their Persona file.

This is an example of what your doll's Persona could look like.

Name	
Age	
Appearance	
Favourite Foods	
Pets	
Favourite toy	
Favourite Activities	
What type of house does he/she live in	
Family Background	
Religion	
Language	
Any other significant details	

Suggestions for introducing the Persona doll and follow up visits

- The children can be seated in a circle as the doll usually visits at circle time.
- The doll sits on the practitioners lap and the practitioner listens to the doll and tells the children what the doll has said.
- The practitioner gives a few facts about the doll-his/her name, where he /she lives and encourages the children to ask more questions.
- The practitioner is encouraging the children to make friends with the doll on every visit.
- The next time the doll visits it may bring an item to share with the children for example' a story book or a photo album. Recount what the children know about the Persona doll from the first visit.
- The Persona doll could have a back pack/bag in which to bring items to the setting.
- The next visit a situation, experience, problem could be explored with the children to find a resolution to, if necessary.

Some ideas for linking Persona dolls and RE

- Persona dolls can help children to understand and emphasise with different cultures and religions.
- If there are few or no members of a faith community the Persona doll can visit to explain about its faith background.
- Let the Persona doll visit the setting as a new friend and talk about their favourite toy, food, pet etc. for a few visits before introducing the aspects of the faith that you want to teach the children about.
- The Persona doll could then visit with a story or story book to share.
- The Persona doll could visit with an artefact to talk about.
- The Persona doll could visit in traditional dress.
- The Persona doll could bring special food to share.
- The Persona doll could explain a special festival.
- If there are parents/carers from that faith and if possible the local faith community they can be asked to contribute ideas or lend resources, artefacts for the Persona doll to bring to the setting.
- They will be helpful for example, in explaining the use of these artefacts or how to pronounce a name, if the practitioner is unsure.

As the children will have met and made friends with the doll before they will show a natural curiosity for the stories and artefacts they will want to learn more from their friend.

The Persona doll will be more successful in the setting when...

- Practitioners are all committed to the use of a Persona doll.
- Practitioners have all contributed to the Persona story of each doll in use.
- Practitioners can practice with each other as the audience to gain confidence using the Persona doll.
- If possible, the practitioners receive training in using the Persona doll.
- The Persona doll is treated with respect by the children and practitioners that any visitor to the setting would receive.

To find out more.....

- The Little Book of Persona Dolls - Marilyn Bowles
Featherstone Education
ISBN: 1-904187-86-2
- Persona Dolls in Action DVD and book- Persona Doll training
- Celebrating Diversity DVD and book-Persona Doll training
www.Persona-doll-training.org

Persona Doll Training website also has a 'Have Your Say' where practitioners post their experiences and ideas for using Persona dolls.

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