

ROLE PLAYING: A GUIDE FOR ITS USE BY SNCC REPRESENTATIVES

WHY:

You face a tough, complicated job as SNCC representatives, mobilizing broad support and carrying out a voter-education program in Deep South communities. How you approach people, how well you understand them and yourselves, how you work with them, can make the difference between success and failure.

In the following kinds of field situations (and many others), role-playing can be used to help you "test out" or analyze problems, or help others to do so, before actually dealing with them:

1. Securing cooperation with SNCC from suspicious local Negro leadership;
2. Training volunteers who are going to "knock on doors" and get people out to register;
3. Understanding the "opposition" and learning how to deal with it; for example, white politicians.

WHAT:

Role-playing is a spontaneous acting out of a problem by a group of people seeking to understand how it might be handled. Each of the role-players decides how to interpret or act out his own particular role. The same problem, therefore, can result in a number of different solutions.

HOW:

How does a group go about using role-playing as a means of understanding themselves and others? Like other dramatic presentations, role-playing needs a director. He is needed to help define the problem situation, select the players and get the audience and players "warmed up" and ready for the action to follow. He needs to be well acquainted with role-playing and be able to "set the mood" and encourage the actors to be spontaneous in living their roles.

There are six basic steps involved in role-playing:

1. Deciding upon the problem.
2. Selecting group members to play the various roles.
3. Getting actors and audience ready for the situation to be presented.
4. Acting out the situation.
5. Cutting it off at a point where the problem has been dramatized but the solution or outcome is uncertain.
6. Discussing and analyzing the situation and making plans for further testing and analyzing.

SAMPLE SITUATION:

Two SNCC representatives are trying to get under way in a new community. They go to see the head of the local businessmen's association. They hope to secure his cooperation as the leader of a power group, and one from whom they might also get funds.

The business leader, who is "well heeled," owes his business "success" to exploiting the community. He pretends to get along with the students representing SNCC, but at the same time he tries to discourage their efforts, which might upset his apple-cart. OR:

The businessman who is accustomed to "running things" in the community--head of various civic organizations, political committees, etc.--is a self-made man, who doesn't intend to surrender any of his power to "young upstarts." OR:

The businessman believes in what the student movement is doing in their goals and program, but he is not sure what he thinks of the two SNCC representatives who approach him. He is trying to decide whether they are "using" the organization to gain personal benefit and power.