



Incorporating Role Play In English Classes Of An Intermediate Level

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Journal Website:
<http://usajournalshub.com/index.php/tajssei>

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ABSTRACT

One of the foremost responsibilities of language teachers should be not just to let students to acquire set phrases, but also to teach how to interact in a variety of situations, to develop and practice new language and behavioural skills in a relatively safe setting. In recent years, there has been a growing interest to integrate meaningful use of language and rich authentic communication in English classes. Yet, one of the universally effective methods in the classroom, which meets the demand of all above requirements, is a role play. In the present article the attempt is made to investigate the effectiveness of the role play in English classes of an intermediate level.

KEYWORDS

Role play, speaking skill, interaction, pragmatic competence.

INTRODUCTION

The reason why this paper focuses on incorporating role play in English classes of an intermediate level is related to the fact that a role play has a central role in teaching new vocabulary and new constructions to the learners of an intermediate level in a nonthreatening environment. My goal is to empower teachers with a picture of how to carry out role play activities in ways that achieve their desired goals.

Generally, a role play can be defined as an activity in which participants act out situations

taking the roles of others. Brian David Phillips (1987) described a role play as “an activity in which the subject is asked to behave as if he or she were a particular person in a particular situation”. Additionally, Scarcella (1992) remarks that in role playing “a participant represents and experiences some character type known in everyday life”. In their research an attempt was made to suggest an idea that role play is one of the engaging tools that puts learners in circumstances resembling the daily life. Riham Aziz El-Dien Muhammed (1985) in

his research work summarized that in a role play participants pretend to be different people, for instance, they can take roles as a farmer, a nurse, a president, a cat". The findings of Lynne Hand (2010) showed that in role play winning is not a goal since it does not have "winners and losers".

Moreover, Burke and O'Sullivan reiterate that role play is a "structured set of circumstances that mirror real life and in which the participant acts as instructed". Concerning those studies, it can be asserted that during a role play the participants are provided information about a person and a situation and they are directed to interact in small groups or in pairs taking the part of different characters not worrying about the quantifiable outcomes.

Given the above understandings we are now in a position to discuss in more detail the advantages of role play.

Development of Speaking Skill and Interaction

Encouraging participants to speak in a variety of different situations and to help them to learn to speak with confidence is important ingredient to master the students in speaking skill and to foster interaction. Hence, a role play is considered as an excellent way to improve students' skills of verbal expression in a range of simulated situations. Larsen-Freeman (1986) and Stephen M. Smith (1984) point out that a role play is an extremely valuable method for fostering speaking in foreign language classroom and for facilitating communication practice. Ladousse (1987) was although appealed by the benefits of role play, he precisely states that role play allows for extended communication between the students and "develops fluency in language and promotes interaction".

Stephen M. Smith (1984) underlines that "role play activates the knowledge and language

associated with topics". His investigations reveal that role play is an effective tool that provides a specific situation within which students can practice various communication skills. The study conducted by Scarcella (1992) gives emphasis to incorporating role play in language classroom and considers role play as an effective tool in enabling participants to practice their communicative ability. It was pointed out that role-play involve a lot of conversation and discussion. Thus it may not be very suitable for low proficiency students who do not have the necessary communicative competence to carry out the activity. These activities would be more suitable for intermediate and advanced learners. Another researcher by the name of Larsen-Freeman (1986) explains that role play "gives meaning to the language learnt in the classroom". The thesis of his work states that this language device is important in communicative approach because it enables students not just to acquire set phrases, but also to learn how to interact in a variety of situations making the class more interesting.

Improvement of Pragmatic Competence and Involvement of Students

Since, pragmatic competence is knowledge of communicative action and how to carry it out (Lee, 1991), in language classroom pragmatic awareness requires special attention. The worthwhile benefit of role play is that it provides merit of practices in developing pragmatic competence and enables whole class participation.

Crookall (1990) and Kendall (1998) illustrated that role play is a trial for real situations since "it makes the world blaze up" in classroom. Their studies indicate that role play has a reference to reality and stimulates practice various communication skills like greeting, apologizing, convincing, arguing, eliciting, analyzing and so on. It could be concluded that arranging learning opportunities through role play increases students' awareness of

what is and what is not appropriate in given context. A well-designed role play could improve classroom dynamics and increase the willingness of students to embrace diverse perspectives is a promising one. While performing a role play students are active participants rather than passive observers. Students make decisions, solve problems, and react to the results of their decisions that ease their transition into using target language artistically.

Furthermore Nunan (1989) particularly examined that through role play introverted and shy students gain fluency and accuracy. What is more, through performing role play participants drop their shyness and increase their self-esteem, motivation, and creativity (Chang, 1990). Accordingly, role play encourages thinking and creativity, lets students develop and practice the material and behavioral skills in a relatively nonthreatening setting, and can create the motivation and involvement necessary for learning to occur. The main idea of this section is that role play is a productive language device that creates an opportunity for participants to use the language correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication goals and motivates them to be active contributors in class.

So far, we discussed the chief advantages of role play. The discussion has underlined that role play initiates interaction, enhances speaking skills, develops pragmatic competence and activates students' partaking. However, the following section outlines some problems that may occur.

PROBLEMS AND ASSUMPTIONS

In conducting any technique in language teaching, teacher might encounter few problems. However, these problems are not obstacle for knowledgeable teachers. Below is a brief description of some of the possible

problems that may arise while carrying out a role play.

Lee Boon Hua (1991) in his groundbreaking project outlines that incorporating role play in large classes fails to bring a desired success. In such cases not all of the students have the option to participate, that consequently causes a big "chaos mess" and disinterest in the class. It is claimed that the other major difficulty with conducting a role play is the student resistance. Some students may find a role play as a childish and irrelevant to language learning. Lee Boon Hua proposes that in order to avoid being in such situations teacher is supposed to be convinced in his/her purposes in introducing the role play. Another inevitable problem is skipping into "mother language" during discussion. Interestingly, Lee Boon Hua reports that teacher "should allow flexibility in this but make it known to the students that finally the target language has to be used". The other common problem that arises while performing a role play is a "noise level". That is why, Lee Boon Hua suggests, teacher must bear in mind to control the activity. Additionally, L. B. Hua accentuates that "lack of space" is another common issue. The study done by L. B. Hua states that teacher should rearrange to create a performance space.

Thus, it is demonstrated that when incorporating role play teacher may come across the following obstacles: chaos, usage of mother language, noise level, and lack of space. Therefore, teacher must be equipped in handling with such problems.

This article has argued that role play provides considerable and valuable benefits. The claim made here is that the students develop and sharpen their English speaking, stimulate their interest and curiosity, and enhance their vocabulary through implementation of role play. Thus, the English teachers of an intermediate level are required to apply one of

the dynamic and progressive approach in teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, when the role play technique is employed, it should be integrated with other language learning activities, given the preparation and care which is required in any language learning method, and adapted to student needs and level. If these guidelines are followed, it can be a rewarding experience for both the students and teacher

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