

**An Integrated Approach to Enhance Language Skills
(LSRW) of the ESL Learners by incorporating Role-
Play into the Classrooms**

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Introduction

Incorporating role-play into the classroom adds variety, a change of pace and opportunities for a lot of language production and also a lot of fun! It can be an integral part of the class and not a 'one-off' event. If the teacher believes that the activity will work and the necessary support is provided, it can be very successful. However, if the teacher isn't convinced about the validity of using role-play the activity "will fall flat on its face just as you expected it to" (Gillian Porter Ladousse 1987). Therefore, if you think positive and have a go, you may be pleasantly surprised!

What is role-play?

Role-play is any speaking activity when you either put yourself into somebody else's shoes, or when you stay in your own shoes but put yourself into an imaginary situation!

Imaginary people - The joy of role-play is that students can 'become' anyone they like for a short time! The President, the Queen, a millionaire, a pop star the choice is endless! Students can also take on the opinions of someone else. 'For and Against' debates can be used and the class can be split into those who are expressing views in favour and those who are against the theme.

Imaginary situations - Functional language for a multitude of scenarios can be activated and practised through role-play. 'At the restaurant', 'Checking in at the airport', 'Looking for lost property' are all possible role-plays.

Why use role-play?

It is widely agreed that learning takes place when activities are engaging and memorable. Jeremy Harmer, a great language expert advocates that the use of role-play for the following reasons:

It's jovial and motivating session. Slow-learners get motivated themselves to become expressive. The arena of the classroom is widened to include the outside world - thus offering a much wider range of language opportunities to slow-learners.

In addition to these reasons, students who will at some point travel to an English-speaking country are given a chance to rehearse their English in a safe environment. Real situations can be created and students can benefit from the practice. Mistakes can be made with no drastic consequences.

Most important points to be adopted while implementing role-play in the class room:

Role-play is possible at elementary levels providing the students have been thoroughly prepared. Try to think through the language the students will need and make sure this language has been presented. Students may need the extra support of having the language on the board. I recently did a 'lost property office' role-play with elementary adults and we spent time beforehand drilling the structures the students would need to use. When the role-play began the students felt 'armed' with the appropriate language. At higher levels the students will not need so much support with the language but they will need time to 'get into' the role.

The role of the teacher Some of the possible teacher roles are:
Facilitator - students may need new language to be 'fed' in by the teacher. If rehearsal time is appropriate the feeding in of new language should take place at this stage.

Spectator - The teacher watches the role-play and offers comments and advice at the end.

Participant - It is sometimes appropriate to get involved and take part in the role-play yourself.

Mistakes Correction is possible on the spot.

There are many ways to correct mistakes when using role-play. It is rarely appropriate for the teacher to jump in and correct every mistake. This could be incredibly demotivating! Some

students do like to be corrected straight after a role-play activity, while the language is still fresh in their minds. Sentences with errors can be written on the board for the group to correct together.

Self-correction - If you have the equipment to record the role-plays either on audio cassette or on video, students can be given the opportunity to listen to the dialogue again and reflect on the language used. They may find it easy to spot their own mistakes.

Peer-correction - Fellow students may be able to correct some mistakes made by their peers. Students could be asked to listen out for both great bits of language they'd like to use themselves, and some mistakes they hear. Be careful to keep peer-correction a positive and profitable experience for all involved.

Making a note of common mistakes yourself and dealing with them in future classes ensures that the students don't lose motivation by being corrected on the spot or straight after the role-play. Negotiate with students and ask them how they would like to be corrected.

One of the significant observations made by several research students on English language Teaching and learning in India is lack of students' participation in classroom discussions due to low confidence levels and ineffective exposure to language skills and practice. Several attempts have been made to address such long standing problems in the context of second language teaching and learning. Students' inhibitions, shyness, fear, low confidence levels and language problems have never been addressed appropriately and adequately in schools, colleges and universities.

In addition, to these the scene of English language classrooms is largely teacher-centered and consequently the role and spirit of students is undermined.

Many training programmes and conferences have been conducted to address and overcome such critical issues of ELT in India. Such programmes have helped improve teaching and learning only in certain groups but the benefits have not

reached the school and college level in general. Moreover, English language has been taught like a subject rather than as a means of expression. Of one's inner self and thought. Hence, there is a need to empower practicing teachers with the help of continuous professional developmental programmes such as collaborative language learning (CLL) which promotes collaborative discussions, needs analysis, series of systematic problem-solving phases and self reflective thinking. Such things become a platform for brain-storming sessions through research of various problems and their solutions in the process of effective teaching and learning.

One such attempt which was made by the researchers collaboratively is the use of role-play through the methodology of collaborative action research (CAR). The aim of this research is to increase student participation in and outside classrooms. It is a small scale research study conducted for three weeks in English language lab sessions. Since the attempt has attained the intended objectives of the research to a great extent, it is decided to share the researcher's experiences with a wider teaching community.

Objectives of the actions research:

- To encourage students' participation and to reduce their inhibitions.
- To integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.
- To improve negotiating skills and to give form to their thoughts.
- To enhance students' ability to communicate in real time / authentic situations.

Sample of the study:

The subjects of the research were Diploma and B.Tech students from one of the reputed colleges of Visakhapatnam were selected as sample for the research. This was a heterogeneous group of students coming from various social, economic and cultural backgrounds.

Research tools;

Research tools such as observation and informal student interviews were used to elicit the responses of the students. These tools were used for data collection and the data gathered was analyzed using qualitative methods.

Methodology and Procedure of the Research:

CLL methodology is employed by the researchers with an aim to overcome and find solutions to the existing problems. The study was conducted in 20 sessions of English Language classrooms and each session was of 50 minutes duration totaling 12 hours and 30 minutes spread over a period of two weeks.

Role-play and its significance in enriching students' participation;

As stated above, role-play is one of the essential tools that help encourage participation and reduce inhibitions. Role play has been successfully used in ESL classrooms across the world. According to Courtney (1974), mechanisms such as play acting and thought are interconnected; they help students to test out reality, to minimize personal anxieties and inhibitions, and to master their fields of action. Role-play gives a valuable opportunity to the students to hone their English language skills [I.e.; listening, speaking, reading and writing in an integrated way]. For instance, the process of role-play begins with the instructions of teachers on role-play and its relevance in language classrooms. It is followed by briefing on the role-play used for the session and discussion with the students on assigning roles to them. This discussion provides scope for students to interact with their teacher and peer group, which in turn contributes to their listening and speaking skills. This is followed by the teacher's advice to go through the relevant material on the intended role-play, besides writing dialogues for the specific roles assigned to them. Such activities as a part of the role-play promote their reading and writing skills. Thus, various phases involved in role-play promote negotiating skills and communicative competence of the students.

This apart, it helps faculty to demonstrate the delivery of dialogues with requisite modulation of voice in harmony with appropriate body language. According to Brown [2001] as cited in Huang [2008], role-play modestly engages offering a role to one or more members of a group and giving a goal or purpose that participants must attain. Role-play is a learner-centered activity as it develops student's enthusiasm to learn the subject matter and to discuss the contents therein. According

to Poorman [2002], integrating experiential learning activities in the classrooms increases interest in the subject matter and understanding of course content.

Dialogue writing:

The process of writing dialogues for the role-play was begun with peer group discussions which helped students to develop their first draft. Under the guidance of the trainee teacher and the faculty, students further reviewed and revised their dialogues in the subsequent drafts. Thus, through collaborative efforts, the students were able to produce the final draft in one week's time.

During this course of time, students experienced language learning in a more meaningful and encouraging way without their conscious efforts. This collaborative work facilitated them in several ways as they got opportunities to listen to their faculty, peer group and considers on the role-play.

It also actively involved them in speaking skills as they had to respond to their faculty. P. In addition to these, they read their prescribed role-play and on the general informative group and outsiders to express their views on available on role-play on the internet. Thus, they put a great effort to improve their reading skills without being aware of it.

Finally, they intently focused on writing skills in the form of writing and revising their drafts several times. Thus, the role-play encouraged the students to come forward and participate actively in discussions, besides improving their social skills and etiquette. The whole process of doing role-play facilitated students to enhance their LSRW skills. The efforts of the students were fruitful as they were able to experience all those mentioned above. Developing dialogues for the characters and scenes also helped students to empathize with the characters, to comprehend the situation and to undertake the role in total alignment with the narrative. The information presented above states the process of writing dialogues for the role-play and it leads to the next logical step of practising and enacting the role-play. The ensuing section focuses on them.

Practice of Role-play:

The process of writing dialogues was completed with the final approval of the faculty. It led to the next step of practising their role-play. The practice sessions were begun in the English sessions for about a week. During these sessions, students had an opportunity to watch performances of other groups which helped them to know the merits and demerits of role-play.

This apart a majority of the students gained confidence and shed their inhibitions to a great extent. After a reasonably good performance, suggestions were given to them to exchange their roles and practice, as it helped them to grasp their total scene of the role-play. Then, students were given the suggestion to take up their own roles and practice again several times. When students gained confidence to perform role-play without any assistance, they were encouraged to take up the role-play before the whole class.

This practice helped students to cope with the dialogues, situation, and characters in the play and to emphasize with the character which in turn helped them to undertake role-play in the then-best manner possible. Thus, the practice sessions were conducted fruitfully and this led to the final phase of performing the role-play before the whole class.

Incredible results of Role-Play from Slow learners:

While working in Diploma and Engineering colleges, in the English Laboratory class (English Communication Skills Laboratory) I conducted several role-plays to my diploma as well as B.tech students on diversified topics. To my surprise, I got amazed for have got slow-learners also deliberately and heartfully participated without any kind of shy feeling or inhibitions and improved their speaking English speaking ability and started speaking before faculties and elders. I could proudly say that it was my unforgettable and memorable achievement. And I believed that role-play would do wonders in the life of ESL students.

With this experience, I personally recommend to all the English fraternity to implement as far as possible role-play session to your students whether they are schools students or college students. If role-play session conducted effectively either in

the classroom or in the English laboratory definitely this role-play sessions would bring a great unprecedented change in their English communication and would get recognized by all wherever they go and get desired placements in the corporate sector in the future with this skill.

Findings:

Research tools such as personal observation and informal student interviews were great sources of help for the researcher to elicit responses and to arrive at the findings of the research. The findings of the research were positive and encouraging. Some of the key findings are mentioned below:

Role-play had given the students the required impetus to communicate in a variety of authentic situation. The whole process had encouraged the students to a great extent. A majority of the students expressed that their inhibitions had been reduced. It was also evident from the interaction of the shy students that they had improved their negotiating skills. As mentioned earlier , role-play facilitated the integration of LSRW skills.

The procedure of the research and activity had helped give sufficient exposure for listening skills as students had to interact with faculty and peer group regularly.

This research study also provided a number of opportunities for students to voice their views on various aspects during discussion , practice and execution of the role-play.

It also required students to read the original text of the role-play besides other available resources on role-play to enrich their abilities and contribution.

Students got a wonderful opportunity of writing dialogues for various role besides editing and redrafting their dialogues. This process gradually enriched their writing skills. Students expressed their willingness to participate in such events to get a good exposure for participating in public speaking activities. The activity also exposed students to the necessary social skills and etiquette to be followed.

A majority of the students had overcome the barriers of gender and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Thus, the whole process had greatly enriched the interaction between teachers and students. In addition to the above findings, such activities always cheer up the classroom atmosphere ; in settings, the teaching of the textual unit has also become quite easy for teachers and for learners to understand.

Conclusion:

This is an action research study which aimed at reducing various inhibitions which hamper student participation in classrooms. The study had taken role-play as a tool and it employed collaborative language learning , (CLL) as the methodology to conduct the research. The findings of the research show that the objectives of the research have been attained to a great extent. The whole experience of the researcher substantiates that activities of the kind do always maximize the role of learners, boost their morale and develop interaction levels between the teacher and the taught for the process of effective and joyful teaching and learning.

Referenced Books:

- Role Play - Gillian Porte Ladousse (Oxford 1987)
The Practice of English Language Teaching - Jeremy Harmer (Longman 1989)
Role-Play-A resource book for Teachers by Gillian Porter Ladousse