

ROLE-PLAYS AND DIDACTIC GAMES

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**Annotation:**

This article deals with the important roles of role-plays and didactic games in the English classes. There are several reasons for using role-play and didactic games in the classroom and teachers can use for themselves.

**Key words:** Role-play, didactic games, Feed-in language,...

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". Therefore, if you think positive and have a go, you may be pleasantly surprised.

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.

Why is role-play?

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

It's fun and motivating

Quieter students get the chance to express themselves in a more forthright way

The world of the classroom is broadened to include the outside world – thus offering a much wider range of language opportunities. 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 environmental situations can be created and students can benefit from the practice. Mistakes can be made with no drastic consequences.

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 :

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.

Bring situations to life

Realia and props can really bring a role-play to life.A group of my young learners recently played the roles of pizza chef and customer.A simple cone of white card with CHEF written on it took a minute to make and I believe it made the whole process more fun and memorable for the class.As soon as it was placed on their heads they became the pizza chef and acted accordingly. Rearranging the furniture can also help. If you are imagining you are at the tourist information office or at the doctor's surgery try to make it as real as you can. Students can even leave the room and make an entrance by knocking on the door.Keep it real and relevant.

Try to keep the roles you ask students to play as real to life as possible.It may be hard for students who have little opportunity to travel to imagine they are in "Ye Olde Tea Shop" in the heart of the English countryside. However, it may be within their schema to imagine they have been asked to help an English speaker who is visiting their own country. This may involve using some L1 to explain about the local culture or to translate local menus into English for the guest to their country . Students working in the business world may find it easy to role-play a business meeting with colleagues visiting from abroad.If you are working with young children , try to exploit their natural ability to play. They are used to acting out a visit to the shops or preparing food ,as that is how they play with their friends.

Feed-in language

As students practice the role-play they might find that they are stuck for words and phrases. In the practice stage the teacher has a chance to 'feed-in' the appropriate language. This may need the teacher to act as a sort of 'walking dictionary', monitoring the class and offering assistance as and when necessary. If you are not happy doing this and you feel that the process of finding the new language should offer more student autonomy, you could have 'time-out' after the practice stage for students to use dictionaries to look up what they need.

As mentioned in the role of the teacher section, feeding –in the language students need is fundamental. By doing so, they will learn new vocabulary and structure in a natural and memorable environment. It is a chance to use real and natural

language. Role-play can be a lot of fun. If you still feel reluctant to use it in the class I suggest you begin to integrate it slowly. Why not extend an appropriate reading or a listening from a course book and turn it into a role-play? You may be pleasantly surprised by the results! Although we don't have time to explore each of these in detail, it is important to note that all of them focus on group experiences rather than on unilateral behavior of the teacher. The group should share in the defining of the problem, carrying out the role playing situation, discussing the results, and evaluating the whole experience. The teacher must identify the situation clearly so that both the characters and the audience understand the problem at hand. In casting the characters, the wise teacher will try to accept volunteers rather than assign roles. Students must realize that acting ability is not at stake here but rather the spontaneous discharge of how one thinks the character of his role would react to the defined situation. Players may be instructed publicly so that the audience can interpret the meaning of their behaviour. Be sure to allow for creativity of the actors within their character roles and do not overstructure the situation.

The discussion and analysis of the role-playing situation depends upon how well we involve the audience. Key questions may be asked by the leader and/or buzz groups may be formed. All members of the group should participate and the reactions of the actors may be profitable compared to those of the audience.

The audience is just as much involved in the learning situation as the actors are. In the analysis and discussion time, the audience should provide possible solutions to the realistic problem situations which surface. It is important to evaluate role playing in the light of the prescribed goals. Categorizing behaviour is often overdone and gets in the way of the learning process. Evaluation should proceed on both group and personal levels, raising questions concerning the validity of the original purpose.

Throughout the entire process it will be necessary to deal with certain problems which arise in role playing situations. The backward, silent member must be encouraged to contribute. Create an atmosphere in which he is unafraid to share ideas, confident that no one will laugh at his contributions or harshly criticize his conclusions.

At the end of the discussion time the group should collectively measure its effectiveness in reaching biblical solutions to the role problem posed at the beginning.

#### **Reference:**

1. Role Play - Gillian Porte Ladousse (Oxford 1987)
2. The Practice of English Language Teaching - Jeremy Harmer (Longman 1989)