

Role-Play and Simulation

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Introduction

In recent years, language teaching has focused on the learning process rather than the teaching of the language. The emphasis is not only on the linguistic competence of the language learner but also on the development of the communicative ability of the learner. Learners need to learn how to use the target language in “real-life” situations and not the “artificial” situation of the classroom where often drills and structured dialogues are taught.

Drama or drama activities meet this need for presenting “real-life situations” for the language learner to use the target language. For drama is considered a useful and a unique teaching tool, vital for language development.

Drama activities are concerned with what is happening within and between the members of a group who are placed in a dramatic situation. It is not intended for performance and involves spontaneous participation from the participants. Maley and Duff (1978) consider that these activities give the students opportunities to use their own personality in creating the material on which part of the language class is based. The material would thus be more relevant and meaningful to the students since it is their own creation.

Dramatic activities include role-play, simulation, games, acting and miming. These activities give the students opportunities to explore ideas and characters in the target language.

The preparatory work which involves discussion is more important than presentation. For the focus is on doing rather than presentation. From the various descriptions of dramatic activities, we can say that they are learner-centred activities. The students have to draw on their language resources in order to take part in

the activities. The various kinds of activities provide opportunities to create different real-life situations for the students to use the target language.

Relating Drama to Language Teaching

With the emphasis on the communicative approach to language teaching, the use of dramatic activities is making its presence felt in the classroom even at the tertiary level. However, before drama activities are implemented there are some practical considerations for the teacher.

The Role of the Teacher

The teacher must first of all be convinced of what she is doing. She must have the conviction that drama can be an effective tool in language teaching. She must have clear objectives as to her role and the use of dramatic activities in achieving her goals. She is the one who sets the mood of the class. She must change her attitude towards her role in the classroom. In the drama classroom she needs to be less domineering and gradually withdraw. Her main function should be that of an initiator controlling but not directing the situation. Her rapport with the students is important. The students should feel at ease and relaxed in the classroom. Certain warming activities can help to achieve this. This will be discussed later.

Although the teacher is to slowly withdraw from the main scene, she still needs to be in control of all that is going on in class. She can still do this without appearing domineering if she has clear objectives and has prepared herself thoroughly. She must give clear instructions to the students to carry out their various tasks. She must also have close control of time so that her plans can be carried out accordingly. Thus do not be over ambitious in the aims of the lessons.

For lower level or weaker classes, there is a need for language preparation before the class. Lists of words, phrases, functions and sentence types, which are relevant to the activities to be carried out, have to be prepared before hand. These have to be presented to the students before the activities so that they can use them as aids/tools in their tasks.

Role of the Learner

In recent years there has been a move towards the "whole-person" approach. The learner thus becomes the centre of focus and at the centre of the language learning process. This is influenced by the "effective humanistic approach" to language teaching. With this in mind, language learning must therefore appeal to the language learner intellectually and emotionally. Stevick (1980), states that language learning must appeal to the creative, intuitive aspect of personality as well as the conscious and the rational part.

Drama activities provide opportunities for active student participation. The activities involve the student's whole personality and not merely his mental process. Effective learning takes place as the student involves himself in the tasks and is motivated to use the target language. As he uses the language, he becomes more aware of his ability to use the language and this will hopefully increase his motivation to learn.

In drama activities, the student is encouraged to discuss, evaluate and describe the activities. He has to explain, interpret and make decisions. The student thus has little time to be idle or daydream for he is an active participant in the lesson. Students may take some time to get used to this active role and the teacher may have to slowly but firmly initiate this change in the role and even attitudes.

Warming up Activities

To develop a climate of trust, awareness and co-operation in which creative collaboration can occur, warming up activities are necessary. These are introductory activities which help to break the ice and develop rapport. They also prepare the students for the activity and help to focus on the matter at hand. Furthermore, these activities hope to bring about an atmosphere where genuine communication can take place.

Examples of warming up activities are handshakes, verbal and vocal warm-up exercises, trust and sensitivity exercises e.g. leading the blind and many others.

The Need for Space

Since drama activities involve a lot of movement by the students

there is a need for open space. The traditional arrangement of rows of chairs and tables has to be changed. Booking the school hall or gym would be ideal. This need for open space also has a psychological effect. It tends to make the students feel more relaxed and less confined since students who are diffident and reluctant to participate initially, will be made to do so because they do not have their desks to "hide" behind and will soon feel even more awkward by not participating in the activities.

Problems

In any technique in language teaching problems are bound to arise. However, these problems are not insurmountable. Below is a brief description of some of the possible problems that may arise in the carrying out of dramatic activities.

Student resistance

The students may view the use of dramatic techniques as trivial and irrelevant to language learning. The higher level students may even consider it childish. The teacher therefore must be clear and convinced in her purpose in introducing drama in the classroom. She must believe in the value of acting and must explain to the students the value of the activity. Feedback at the end of the activity is important for it helps to reinforce the aim and the purpose of the activity.

For shy and reticent students, the teacher has to be sensitive to them and not use force to get them to participate. She should avoid giving too difficult tasks which they are not able to handle. She should make positive comments wherever possible and not demand too much. This would gradually build up the confidence of the students.

The use of the mother tongue

It is inevitable, especially initially, for students to use the mother tongue or their L1 in their discussions. The teacher should allow flexibility in this but make it known to the students that finally the target language has to be used. Sometimes to allow the activity to develop, the activities can be explained in the mother tongue or the L1. But the actual presentation has to be done in the target language.

Noise level

As the students warm up with the activity and depending on the size of the group and the room, noise level will be high. This is unavoidable. The teacher and the class will soon get used to it. However, it is a good idea to keep it under control so as not to disturb the other classes as well. Perhaps the teacher should give prior notice to the teachers of the nearby classes of the possible noise level so that when noise occurs they would have been forewarned.

The lack of space

Lack of space is a common problem. If it is not possible to book the school hall or any large room, the teacher can still use the classroom. Chairs and tables can be pushed to the back of the classroom so as to make space for some open area in the front. As a last resort, a shady spot out in the school field is a possible solution.

The use of dramatic activities in the language classroom is thus not an easy task. It is not something you do as a last resort to liven things up in class. Careful thought and preparation is needed. It is in fact easier to teach from the textbook than to teach using drama as a tool. It must be remembered too, that drama is only one of the many tools used in language teaching and should not replace other tools nor should it be overused.

The Use of Role-Play and Simulation in Language Teaching

The common aim of all dramatic activities is to provide opportunities for interaction and to initiate communicative skills. Drama activities include role-play, simulation, improvisation, language games, acting, and script reading. In this discussion, only role-play and simulation will be discussed in detail.

Definition

Role-play and simulation are common activities in the classroom. Although role-play and simulation are separate activities, they are often conducted at the same time. The distinction between the two may not be as clear cut as it appears. They in fact complement each other.

Role-play

Role-play is a structured set of circumstances that mirror real life and in which the participant acts as instructed. The participant is asked to play the part of someone else. He is given details about the person and situation that he is supposed to be in. The activity the student is given is in fairly controlled scenarios. The student interacts in small groups or pairs taking the part of different characters. In extended role-playing, improvisation is included. According to Hodgson and Richard (1974), improvisation is a spontaneous response to the unfolding of an unexpected situation. This activity is less guided and allows more room for spontaneous response. The tension or conflict in role-play creates unpredictability and this is a key element in language use and something students should be prepared for.

Simulation

Simulation is a problem-solving activity where the student brings his own personality, experience and opinions to the task (Livingstone, 1983). It involves discussion of a problem which is presented by the teacher. The students normally bring their own experience to the portraying of the roles in simulation. The situation need not be a real life situation like a board meeting but can be imaginary like being stranded in a desert island. Simulation was originally used as a learning technique in business and military training. The outcome of the simulation was of paramount importance. In language learning however, the end product of the decision reached is of less importance than the language used to achieve it.

Role-play is often included within simulation. This allows for extended interaction between the students. These two activities help to recreate the language used in different situations. This is the type of language the students are most likely to use outside the classroom. The main benefit is that it enables a flow of language to be produced that might otherwise be difficult to produce or create.

Advantage of using Role-play and Simulation

For role-play and simulation to be successful, 100% participation from the students should take place. The discussions require a

great deal of mental activity as each student tries to express himself to show his understanding and to relate what is being said with his own opinions. Thus opportunities to generate language use arise. This is one of the main concerns of language teaching.

The problems of discipline and motivation can also be reduced. Learning is active and not passive when role-play and simulation are used. They require mental and physical activity e.g. gesturing to put forward a point. The students have to concentrate in order to participate effectively. This would leave little room for playing tricks or getting into mischief. In fact such negative behaviour can be diverted into the role-play and simulation activities, which ironically can make the situation more interesting. Since the situations in these activities are often related to real life, the students will see the relevance and they may be more motivated to participate and to use the target language. Hence, relevance would increase the motivation to learn, which in turn will increase student involvement, thus reducing discipline problems which often arise from boredom and lack of motivation.

These dramatic activities can be graded to suit a whole range of abilities since no learning group is homogeneous. The roles can be designed for faster or slower learners. The dominant roles can be taken by the fluent students and the shy students can take a less active role but their participation is still required. For lower level classes cue cards can be given to the students to encourage them. Peer learning and peer helping will also be encouraged.

Disadvantages of using Role-play and Simulation

Some students have fixed ideas as to what a good class teacher is. They expect a rigid, fixed procedure in her teaching. They are used to being passive and expect teaching to be teacher-centered. Attitudes like these have to be changed. Before this can be done the teacher's attitudes have to be changed too. She must accept her new role where she does not dominate the class anymore. She is now the observer and must gradually withdraw and allow the student to take over without having the fear of losing control.

Role-play and simulation take a lot of time especially if they include preparation and follow-up work. It also depends on the ability of the class to perform the tasks. The teacher thus has to know the class well so as to assign the students activities to suit

their abilities. Time constraints are especially felt in examination classes which have a set syllabus to follow and to complete.

The lack of space and the large number of students can make the organization of the activities difficult. Noise level will also be high especially, if the size of the classroom is small thus making concentration difficult. Monitoring of the different groups may also be a problem. The teacher thus has to adapt and improvise accordingly, for instance looking for an alternative place or even carrying out the activity outdoors.

When students are encouraged to produce spontaneous speech, mistakes are bound to appear especially in L2 classes. The question on how to correct and when to correct could be a problem to the teacher. The teacher must bear in mind that fluency rather than accuracy is more important. However, it does not mean that the teachers do not correct mistakes at all. This should be done during the discussion and feedback sessions at the end of the activity and not while the students are preparing or carrying out the tasks.

The advantages and disadvantages of role-play and simulation discussed here are not exhaustive. However, by bearing them in mind, it is hoped that they would help the teacher be better prepared as she launches out to use role-play and simulation in the language classroom.

Preparation

As mentioned earlier, when using dramatic activities, preparation is essential. The teacher must be clear about her objectives if the class is to be a success. Preparation for role-play and simulation is just as important. This preparation is discussed below.

- (a) Linguistic preparation – The teacher has to predict the type of language used in the activities. She could either use reading material, model dialogues on tape or any other forms to expose the students to the use of the language for that particular context. These could be done in lessons before the activities are actually carried out.
- (b) Factual preparation – In order to enable the students to play their role with confidence concrete facts or information of the roles should be discussed with or given to the students. Role-cards with relevant details can be given to help the stu-

dents. However, higher level students can construct the information themselves.

Selection of activity

The teacher has to bear in mind the level and interest of the students when she selects the activity. The needs of the students must also be taken into consideration. The reason why they are learning the language would help in the selection of the role-play or simulation activity as these activities are to give them practice for real life situations. For example in the ESP class, activities should be related to the type of course the students are taking. Management students would thus be involved in roles and simulations which are relevant to them for e.g. acting as different types of executives in a board meeting to decide on an important company policy.

Organization

How the activity is to be carried out must be planned and organized properly. Clear instructions must be given to the students, whether they are divided into pairs or groups, to carry out their tasks. When dividing students into groups, the students' abilities and personalities should also be considered. The duration of the activity must also be fixed by the teacher but flexibility should be allowed.

Follow-up

Feedback through class discussion on the content, attitudes of the students and the situation is important. The teacher should find out whether there was enough time for the students to carry out the activity and whether the group worked well or not. All these comments and criticisms would help the teacher to improve and get new ideas for future classes.

The preparation done by the teacher before the actual carrying out of the activity would give the teacher clear direction and confidence to conduct her class even if she is a novice to the idea of using role-play and simulation in the language classroom.

A Simulation/Role-Play Activity

Aims and description of the activity

The aims of the activity were

1. To generate formal discussion among students during which the students were required to:
 - (a) give suggestions in an appropriate manner
 - (b) accept and reject opinions
 - (c) make compromises
 - (d) persuade others to accept their opinions/suggestions
 - (e) come to a common solution
2. To provide opportunity for role-play

The target students were originally second year Medical students doing an English spoken interaction course. Since they were not available, first year Medical students doing an academic reading course were used for trying out the activity. For comparison purposes, a group of first year Dental students doing a similar reading course were also used.

The whole activity took about 55 minutes to execute. The class was divided into four groups of five. Each member of the group were assigned the following roles: 2 cardiac surgeons, a cardiologist, an anaesthetist and a psychiatrist. No details of the characters of the roles were given to them. Their task was to select the most suitable patient for the next heart transplant operation. A worksheet was handed to each student in which details of the four shortlisted patients were provided. While the final criteria for selection was the social background, the students were told that they could still discuss the medical aspects if they felt adequate enough to do so. The reason why the medical aspects were not emphasised was that I felt that second year Medical students may not have enough clinical experience to discuss the medical aspects. However, in contrast, the social aspects were not too "technical" for them. After about 15 minutes of discussion, the teacher announced that two hearts were now available and they could thus choose another patient for the surgery. After another 10 minutes another announcement was made stating that one of the hearts had collapsed and that they were back to

square one! They only had five minutes to make their choice and to get ready for the operation. The lesson plan and worksheet are shown in the appendix.

After the simulation activity, a class discussion took place during which the groups shared their decisions giving reasons for the choice of the patients. They were then given time to fill out a questionnaire for the evaluation of the whole activity. The discussion of one of the groups was also taped for the purpose of evaluation.

Response of the students to the simulation

The students generally responded positively to the activity. Some however were initially a little apprehensive. They felt inadequate taking on the roles because some of them did not really understand the meaning of "cardiologist", "anaesthetist", "psychiatrist" and "cardiac surgeon". After we had a brief discussion on what these people actually do, the students' fears were allayed. They proceeded with the tasks with more confidence. During the discussion, most of the students participated. The weaker students spoke less but their peers did make attempts to encourage them to speak.

The Dental students took a longer time to "warm up" to the activity and needed more persuasion from the teacher than the Medical students. This could be because the Dental students have a slightly lower proficiency in the language compared to the Medical students. Furthermore, I think the context seemed a little remote to them since they do not foresee themselves as cardiac surgeons or cardiologists in the near future. Whereas for the Medical students, I overheard them calling each other "future cardiologists and cardiac surgeons" at the end of the class. As mentioned earlier, relevance to the needs of the students must be considered in the selection of the activity. This would motivate the students and make their participation more meaningful. The response of the Dental students proves this point.

Evaluation from the students

In terms of the level of difficulty of the task, 70% found the task challenging and 30% found the task difficult. More Dental than Medical students found the task difficult. As to the relevance of the activity to their English course, about 90% said that it was rel-

evant. They also said that the activity gave them an opportunity to practice their oral skills in expressing their opinions in English. However, there were a few Dental students who commented that not all the group members participated in the discussions. Most of them did not find the activity very relevant to their Medical or Dental courses. However a few, especially the Medical students, said that the simulation prepared them for the future when they would have to discuss the choice of patients for surgery with colleagues.

All the students in the group favoured having another similar activity in the future.

Evaluation from the teacher

With reference to the first aim of the activity i.e. to generate formal discussion among the students, the simulation succeeded in doing this. As I went round taking notes and listening to the students most of them were holding a formal discussion. They even addressed each other as "Mr." "Miss" and "Dr.". However, there were occasions during which they lapsed into giggles and their informal "lah" and "ya" were heard. There was also little use of the first language (Bahasa Malaysia) except for a sprinkling of "dan" (and) and "tak" (no).

In the questionnaire the students were told to write down the phrases they used to give suggestions, accept and reject opinions, make compromises, persuade and come to an agreement. Most of them used the appropriate forms, although not necessarily the correct form. I heard the following forms used.

Function	Forms used by students
Making a suggestion	"I suggest that Mr.Ahmed should..... "I think Mr. Ahmed should be... "Excuse me, but I think Mr Ahmed...
Accept and reject	"I agree with you..... "Yes, you are right.... "Ya, I accept your opinion!... "No, I don't think so.... "I'm sorry, but I can't agree with you....

Compromise	"Would you consider.... "Okay, lah we'll decide on...
Persuade	"How about this.... "Would you consider.... "Why not choose Miss Yeoh... "I still think that....
Come to a common solution	"So, we all agree.... "Okay we shall choose.... "Okay we all agree to choose.. "So, we have decided on....

From the examples above, we can see that generally the students were able to produce the appropriate forms for the required functions. Although some may have sounded a bit informal, but in our context, were acceptable. The Dental students had some problems producing these forms and concentrated on their reasons and choices.

In terms of providing opportunity for role-play, most of the students did not quite play their roles. This was with the exception of the group which I had taped, who had a chairman who kept reminding the other members of their roles, by addressing them by their roles.

With regards to group interaction, there was more interaction among the Medical students than among the Dental students. The Medical students seemed to have more to say and they could bring some medical aspects into their discussion. However, the discussion among the Dental students was limited as they did not have the necessary medical knowledge.

By using the activity intended for Medical students with the Dental students, a few observations can be made.

1. When the activity lacks relevance to the students, the students are less motivated in conducting the tasks.
2. The level of difficulty of the tasks is also another important factor which determines the success of the activity. For example, more students (although still the minority) in the Dental group found the tape difficult. This affected the quality of the group interaction. Thus, in order for the activity to develop and to warm up, more persuasion and interference from the teacher was needed.

3. The Dental students also lacked the linguistic competence in carrying out the nature of the discourse in a formal meeting. This hindered effective communication among the students.

Generally, the activity could be said to have been successful in terms of achieving its aims. The purpose of using the same activity on the Dental students was to investigate what happens when the teacher selects an inappropriate activity for a group of students.

Suggestions for improvement

1. More factual and linguistic preparation should have been done to prepare the students for the activity. This would have given the students more confidence in their discussions.
2. Perhaps the criteria for selection should have included the medical aspects as well. Then the students may have role-played more realistically.
3. During the feedback and discussion the students should have also discussed the reasons for their choice, comparing their reasons to those given by the other groups.

Conclusion

Simulation and role-play can thus be said to be a useful tool in teaching oral communication as illustrated by the activity discussed above. Students are given opportunities to express themselves, share their opinions and use a little of their imagination. In terms of generating the use of language, this activity has managed to do it quite well. Although all the language used was not accurate, but fluency, in terms of making oneself understood, was achieved. With better preparation and more experience in implementing the activity, simulation and role-play can indeed be a valuable tool for language teaching.

Appendix

LESSON PLAN

Simulation

Aim:

To generate formal discussion among students so that students could:

- a. give suggestions in an appropriate manner
- b. accept and reject opinions
- c. make compromises
- d. persuade others to accept their opinions/
suggestions
- e. come to a common solution

Target Students:

Second year Medical students doing a spoken interaction course.

Time: approximately 45 minutes

Procedure:

1. The class is divided into groups of five.
2. The teacher briefs the class on the situation.
The situation: A group of specialist doctors are trying to decide on the most suitable patient to select for the next heart transplant operation. Four patients have been shortlisted. The medical aspects have been considered. The final criteria for the selection is the social background of the shortlisted patients. Out of the four, only one patient can go for surgery.
3. Each group is given 15 minutes to decide which patient to choose.
4. After 15 minutes, the teacher announces the following to the groups:
The A & E Department has informed the unit that a young couple has just been admitted after a headlong collision along the Seremban Highway. The only functioning organs

left are their hearts. The unit can now decide on two recipients for the emergency heart transplant operation. You are given only 10 minutes to make your decision.

5. Before the 10 minutes is up, another message arrives: One of the hearts mentioned in 4 above cannot be revived. Decide on your recipient and prepare him for the theatre! You are given only 5 minutes to make your decision.
6. While the discussions are going on, the teacher goes round the groups to monitor the discussion. The teacher should note down language structures/forms used.
7. Feedback and discussion.

WORKSHEET

The Situation

A group of specialist doctors are trying to decide on the most suitable patient to select for the next heart transplant operation. Four patients have been shortlisted. The medical aspects have already been considered. The final criteria for selection is the social background of the shortlisted patients. Out of the four only one can go for surgery.

The Team of Specialists

1. Cardiac surgeon (1)
2. Cardiac surgeon (2)
3. The cardiologist
4. The anaesthetist
5. The psychiatrist

Shortlisted Patient

1. Mr. Malachi, 45 years old, six children ranging from 6 to 20 years old, wife is a full-time housewife, sole breadwinner of the family.

2. Miss Yolanda Yeoh, 25 years old, a secretary, the only child, parents are pensioners, engaged to be married next year.
3. Mr. Alex Lee, 35 years old, a successful engineer, wife is a lawyer, has two children aged 8 and 4.
4. Mr. Ahmed, 40 years old, a businessman, has a handicapped teenaged son and a 10 year old daughter, wife is a full-time housewife.

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