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THE LINGVODIDACTICAL IMPORTANCE OF ROLE-PLAY IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract: Role playing helps to bring the language to life and to give the learners some experience of its use as a means of communication. Therefore, the main purpose of role play is to develop communication situation. The realistic communication situation gives the students new experience in using the language they have learned, and the experience is good for remembering what they have learned. Hence, the goal of teaching speaking is similar to the goal of role play technique that is communication. It means role play can be applied in teaching speaking and it can help students in improving their speaking skill.

One strategy language teachers can apply in role plays with fictitious roles and virtual venues is to teach scripted role-plays, pre-teach vocabulary and specialized jargon in the activities, so that students can follow a structured story plot and pre-set vocabulary and sentence patterns.

Keywords: ability, language teachers, role-plays, pre-teach, reflections, learning activities, requirements.
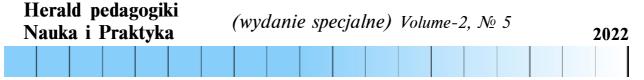
Introduction

Role-playing game forms at school student's ability to play a role of other person, to see itself from a position of the partner in communication. It focuses pupils on planning of own speech behavior and behavior of the interlocutor, develops ability to control the acts, to give an objective assessment to acts of others. Therefore, role-playing game performs the focusing function. There are different views concerning teachers' reflections on the effectiveness of using role plays in language classroom, but the views are basically similar to the initial observations. Teachers basically have two contradicting views. One is that role-playing activities are very useful teaching and learning activities in speaking classes, because it can teach the target language through interactive plays and students can learn the language with its culture and practice language in a communicative way collaboratively. The opposing views are that the use of role-playing activities cannot achieve the intended result as the activities lack student participation, that students have nothing to say in the tasks and that the activities thus turn out to be a failure.

Thus, role-playing game performs 5 main functions in educational process: motivational and incentive, training, educational, focusing and compensatory. Speaking about importance of use of role-playing game at a lesson of a foreign language, it is necessary to stop on requirements to role-playing game. As all functions stated above can be realized only at the competent organization of a game. It is difficult to overestimate educational value of role-playing game, its comprehensive influence on the teenager. A

game helps to rally children's collective, are involved in vigorous activity timid and shy, and it promotes self-affirmation of everyone in collective.

Main part

In role-playing games, the conscious discipline, diligence, mutual aid, activity of the teenager, readiness to join in different types of activity, independence, ability to argue the point of view, to show an initiative, to find the optimal solution in certain conditions is cultivated. As practice of training and special researches shows, pupils are imposed by positive roles. At the same time children with pleasure play roles of negative characters with the purpose to deride their negative lines. That is role-playing games perform educational function. In the conditions of training of the oral foreign-language speech role-playing game is first of all speech activity, game and educational at the same time. From the point of view of pupils role-playing game is a game activity in the course of which they act in certain roles. The purpose of role-playing game is the carried-out activity - a game, the motive lies in the content of activity, but not out of it. Educational character of a game isn't realized by school students. From the teacher's position role-playing game can be considered as a form of the organization of educational process. For the teacher the game purpose - formation and development of speech skills and abilities of pupils. Much important the fact that role-playing game learns to be sensitive to the social use of a foreign language. A good interlocutor often is not the one who uses structures better, and the one who can distinguish most accurately a situation in which there are partners, to consider that information which is already known (from a situation, experience) and to choose those linguistic means which will be most effective for communication.

Structured scripted role-play or dramaplays can be used as an alternative to organize role plays with fully improvised fictitious roles and virtual venues inside language classrooms. Although innovative ideas have been given up as in fully improvised role plays, teachers can guide students to adopt the way of thinking and cultural roles of the fictitious roles by using scripted role plays and help students to build up the cultural knowledge and identities of the targeted fictitious roles.

Scripted role plays, which are highly structured in linguistic form and cultural manifestation, are useful in language training for specific purposes, such as in language trainings for tourism professionals, for legal professionals as well as in staff language courses for various service industries.

Mainland China has national education projects to build national identity through historical drama. This concept can be turned into language tasks to model learners' cultural identities by carrying out role-playing tasks with various fictitious but related real life scenarios and cultural roles in classroom settings.

If language teachers conduct role plays with fictitious roles as highly improvised classroom activities, they need to bear in mind that students may encounter problems and need help for fictitious roles. The problems arise not only because of a lack of linguistic knowledge, but also because of an insufficient understanding of the cultural knowledge behind the fictitious roles they are playing in the activities. Students can only

use their existing social roles, such as the language learner, university student and teenager roles, to play the fictitious roles.

There will be some gaps between the roles of a student and a guide, as well as between those of a teenager and a Prime Minister, and so on. Teachers should take into account the multiple identities of students in class, both their existing social identities and the fictitious roles in the role plays, and assist students to employ the target language with the target cultural roles in the speech community in order to develop their "practical competence".

Language teaching is most effective when the teacher recognizes the multiple identities of students in the class, and develops pedagogical practices that enhance students' investment in the language practices of the classroom. Effective teaching in role plays with fictitious roles require participants, both teachers and students to employ high-order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation and meta cognition.

Language teachers employing this kind of role play in language classrooms should give students enough time and guidance to research the targeted roles in the pre-task stage. Teachers need to provide specific jargon and cultural knowledge if they are aiming at "realistic" conversations.

Method
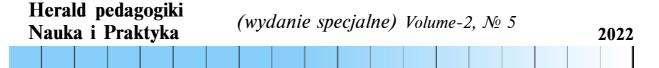
When students are working out the role plays, teachers should not only coach the students by correcting linguistic errors, but also guide the students to think critically about the cultural identities of the fictitious roles and encourage divergent perspectives. Teaching in this kind of improvised role plays with fictitious roles aims at remodeling students' cultural identities to fit the roles of the target culture in order to communicate successfully and negotiate social identity with actual speakers of the target language.

As the essence of all dramatic activities, role-play is used with the principle that drama directly involves the child and thus could motivate the child to learn. During the stage of role-play, students have the opportunity to add new elements to the sample text, which enables them to express their hidden feelings and relate what they have learnt before to what they have just learnt. Instead of the regular way of sitting still and hearing lectures, they become participants of the class which makes them more interested and involved in learning.

They can both present and monitor their own comprehension of the context and by receiving and offering simple, direct and rapid feedback, they find and correct their mistakes in time and improve their language skills efficiently. Moreover, in order to get better comments, the students of the same group learn to cooperate with each other in order to compete with other groups. Therefore, role-play can also promote cooperation and competition in class which stimulates every student to learn. While doing role-play, the students have an opportunity to interpret their roles in the target language creatively. The teachers seldom interfere when the students make mistakes and this will decrease the anxiety of most students, especially shy ones. Also since role-play is much like doing a mini-drama, the students know that they are not displaying their own personalities.

Therefore, as Ladousse comments, the use of role-play provides a mask for students and encourages them to feel liberated in performing. Moreover, while doing role-play, the students who are better at acting than speaking can have a chance to participate. They can express themselves by both words and actions, which will allow them to engage in the class activity instead of sitting or standing still in a normal classroom. This can release their anxiety of being different and isolated in class and could increase their self-image.

While most researchers agree that role-play is effective in developing a learner's verbal interaction skills, few research studies have been done to explore its effectiveness in developing reading and writing skills. Since role-play is widely recognized as an element of simulation, there are many similarities between its advantages and those of simulation. Of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as 'speaker' of that language, as if speaking includes all other kinds of knowing and many foreigners are primarily interested in learning verbal interaction skills. Classroom activities that develop learners' ability to express themselves through speech would, therefore, seem an important component of a language course. Role-play is one of the effective speaking activities that teachers may use.

Since the beginning of the 1970s, the communicative competence wave has swept across the language teaching world. There has been growing emphasis on communication, in which tasks focus on meaning rather than form. Learning for communicative competence the ability to use language appropriately has gained prominence instead of the linguistic competence of knowing grammatical rules. Language proficiency includes not only knowledge of phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and semantics but also the ability to make use of this knowledge appropriately in actual communication.

Some studies show the limitations of the traditional language classroom in developing communicative competence. Scarcella and Crookall review the work of researchers such as Henzl, Holmes and Brown and find that they have pointed out that only in the classroom does one speaker (the teacher) normally control the entire conversation.

In addition, they also note that researchers such as Stubbs, and Long and Sato claim that only in the classroom are conversational participants so frequently asked to answer questions that demonstrate knowledge, which is always about grammatical features. There is little room for genuine communication to occur. Crookall argue that since the teachers determine the whole speaking process, if they do not deal with the full range of types of communication found in the real world, students are less likely to have a full picture of how language is used in the "outside" world.

Role-play activities can compensate for the limitations of the traditional teacher-dominated language classroom. They provide students with a variety of conversational models between different roles and this changes the class to student-centered. In addition, by practicing within different roles, the students can experience a variety of speech acts such as apologies, promises, congratulations, and even threats which they probably will not encounter in a traditional class.

Liu and Ding used role-play technique to see how the students performed in groups when they were given a familiar situation to role play in. They also observed their language potency and how the errors can be corrected as well as how to give feedback to the learners for further improvement. Their observation was that if the teacher gave a familiar situation than the result would be positive and rather giving instant feedback they should be shown the video tapes with oral feedback for self or peer correction.

Conclusion

To sum up, in the intimate relationship between communicative competence and oral activities of role play, language is the invariable by-product, covertly acquitted and implicitly facilitated. By relocating the locus of conversational control and allowing other language models to be introduced and experienced, role-play serves as an effective speaking activity which makes the language class student-centered and self-learning initiated.

Crookall presents another specific skill involved in language development by reviewing Carrel's view that readers relate meaning to schemata which result from cultural expectations and prior experience. They analyze that when the readers' experiences and expectations are similar to the writers, reading is facilitated.   When students are at the beginning stage of role-play, they can have new experiences and see things from their text in a new light, thus altering their "existing schemata". In addition, role-playing activities can also provide the readers with exposure to a wide range of texts (such as letters, flyers, posters and even telegrams), to which they are not often exposed in class. For instance, the teacher can ask the students to play the role as sales representatives and customers at a supermarket.

The students have to collect the flyers from the supermarket, read each catalogue and then interact with each other within the different roles about the information on the flyers. Both sales representatives and customers have to read the flyers carefully in order to play their role successfully. As a result of doing this, students are motivated to read as this activity is more like a game than serious reading.

Role-play is especially helpful in teaching writing skill. It facilitates writing in the following three ways. First, it provides students with situations in which writing occurs naturally. In a traditional writing class, the students are always required to write in vacuum about the given topic. The process is dull and painstaking.

Role-play can change this situation and offer the students chances to write about interesting, relevant and motivating experiences. For example, the teacher can ask the students to play the role as an unsatisfied customer and write a letter to complain to the company about the product he/she purchased.

The students can discuss in groups about the content and format of the letter, and the teacher can choose to give them instruction or writing samples either before or after their writing. Secondly, role-play, like all simulation activities, can help students overcome writer's block by producing a "high degree of student involvement rarely found in ESL writing activities" it can be particularly helpful in the brainstorming and revising

stages of the writing process. "It provides students with opportunities to see their ideas in action and to observe the consequences of their ideas and the alternatives".

"Language and culture are intertwined. It is difficult to teach one fully without the other". Then how can we effectively infuse culture and norms to language teaching and learning? The answer is role-play. By playing different roles, the students interact with each other in a variety of settings, such as home, school, the library, the supermarket, and the church.

The use of role play can help them get to know a range of culturally sensitive areas such as greetings, apologizing and self-introduction relevant to these daily life settings. If teachers can make effective use of role-play and give students necessary instructions of the relevant culture knowledge, the students will consolidate their knowledge in a more practical and relaxed way.

Besides verbal interaction, nonverbal interaction which is regarded as silent language is also important in communication, fact-to-face interaction in particular. Nonverbal interaction includes many components such as facial expressions and body movement. It is important to notice that this kind of language is closely related to culture. While doing role-play, students can try different body language related to different discourse and situations. By doing this, they will get to know the culture and the language more deeply. The role-play is one way of co-teaching a second language and second language culture. The most common situations for role plays are those in which the students may need to function in the target language. As with dialogues, the situations used for role play should be within the realm of experience, possible experience, or knowledge of the students.The more familiar asituation is, the easier it will be for students to participate fully.Appropriate situations include topics that students see or in which they participate in their own lives. Examples include shopping, interacting at school, talking on the telephone, asking for directions, making appointments, and attending business meetings. Other possible situations for role play include fantasy situations from stories, television, or simulations and situations in which students prepare for a future event, for example, interviewing for a job in employment readiness programs.

As it could be understood, pre-communicative activities serve as a base for future communication. In communicative activities itself, learners have to activate and integrate previously learned structures in order to be successful in communication. Littlewood underlines that at this point students face the familiar progression from 'controlled practice' to 'creative language use.' Aim of these activities is to practice communication. Again, Littlewood divides communicative activities into two sub-groups depending on the importance of functional and social meaning. Functional communicative activities have an easy criterion of success: practical effectiveness of the task. However, in social interaction activities student "is also encouraged to take account of the social context in which communication takes place. He is required to go beyond what is necessary for simply 'getting meaning across' in order to develop greater social acceptability in the language he uses. At first, this might involve only greater grammatical accuracy, later, it may mean producing more suitable speech according to circumstances and relationships between speakers.

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