

**ROLE-PLAYING AS EDUCATIONAL TECHNIQUE IN FOREIGN
LANGUAGES EDUCATION**

Role-playing is a methodology derived from sociodrama that may be used to help students understand the more subtle aspects of literature, social studies, and even some aspects of science. Further, it can help them become more interested and involved, not only learning about the material, but learning also to integrate the knowledge in action, by addressing problems, exploring alternatives, and seeking novel and creative solutions. Role-playing is the best way to develop the skills of initiative, communication, problem-solving, self-awareness, and working cooperatively in teams [2, p. 92-96].

According to N. Curran a role-playing game is a game in which the participants assume a character role and determine that character's actions, within a specific scenario, with agreed rules, played individually or in a group, with or without a mediator, and where the outcome is without definite limits as a duration or amount. In her studies she points out that the purpose of the role-playing games has expanded, and apart from their primary functions of enjoyment and entertainment, role-playing games are often used for training and education purposes, to develop skills and strategies, or to allow participants to cooperate with others on tasks as part of a team [5, p. 45].

Some scientific studies emphasized linguistic and affective benefits of role-play: role-play was shown to improve the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar structures and to promote spontaneous language use [6, p. 120]. Spontaneity is of utmost importance, and this technique is best used when a problem arises spontaneously rather than when the teacher decrees that it should be used. Thus the need for flexibility in lesson plans and in the teacher's personality is implied [3, p. 78]. It was also touted as a means of increasing students' motivation, engagement, and confidence [6, p. 120].

The study of A. Ilieva shows that playing happens through communication: no interaction is possible without the exchange of information. Depending on the time and design of the game, interaction may be rich or relatively limited. She emphasizes that live role-playing games involve collaboration between players through face-to-face social activity, relying on direct and synchronous communication [1, p. 27].

Role-playing is one form of dramatic play which is particularly advantageous for classes in Business English.

The teacher often finds that the individual student perceives a problem in the light of his own experiences and interpretations. Dramatizing or acting out the situation enables him to try to act, and feel as another person might act and feel in the situation. Role-playing thus becomes an exercise in empathy and serves as a valuable technique for promoting both self acceptance and understanding and acceptance of others.

Role-playing enables students to explore and discuss problems on impersonal basis [3, p. 78]. The use of role-playing as an educational or training technique is part of the wider set of techniques that have collectively become known as simulation and gaming. These are techniques which aim to provide the student with either highly simplified reproduction of part of a real or imaginary world (a simulation) or a structured system of competitive play that incorporates the material to be learnt (a game) [4, p. 3].

Many simulations involve students in making decisions and communicating or negotiating with one another. These students provide the human element in the system that is being studied and they are expected to react to the situation in a way that will be determined by how they and

the other participants see their relative position, motivations and attitudes — in other words how they see their role within the system.

Role-play is the name given to one particular type of simulation that focuses attention on the interaction of people with one another. It emphasizes the functions performed by different people under various circumstances [4, p. 3-4].

The idea of role-play, in its simplest form, is that asking someone to imagine that they are either themselves or another person in a particular situation. They are then asked to behave exactly as they feel that person would. As a result of doing this they, or the rest of the class, or both, will learn something about the person and/ or situation. In essence, each player acts as part of the social environment of the others and provides a framework in which they can test out their repertoire of behaviours or study the interacting behaviour of the group [4, p. 4].

Role-players can take on the roles of imaginary people, real people, or themselves. Situations may be simple or elaborate, familiar or strange. They may be described in detail or left to the imagination of the role-player. The action may be played out fully or last for days; it may be a fragment and last for minutes.

The aim of the role-player is to feel, react and behave as closely as possible to the way someone placed in that particular situation would do. They are only concerned with the effects of their behaviour on the other players, not an audience, and will do whatever is necessary within their role to persuade and convince them that their ideas and decisions are important [4, p. 9].

The role-play can run for a few minutes, up to half an hour or even longer. At the end there is a debriefing session in which observers may comment on the way in which the characters behaved and the lessons to be drawn from this. The players themselves will always take an important part in this debriefing.

As a technique, role-play has proved to be very popular. It is highly motivating and enables students to put themselves in situations they have never experienced before; in particular it opens the way for them to put themselves in other's shoes [4, p. 10]. Actually students are able to modify and implement different situations during the classes of Business English mastering their language skills.

There are many types of situation where practical experience is used to help students develop their interpersonal skills. There are individual situations such as counseling, interviews, customer service and sales, personal relationships, etc; there are also group situations such as committees, negotiations, public meetings, team working or group interviews [4, p. 12]. In the process of acting students may demonstrate their knowledge on different subjects in Business English and at the same time improve their language proficiency (phonetic, grammar, and lexical skills).

Though role-playing is rather widely-spread and effective technique in education process and is considered to be rather creative and alternative form in lessons, in our paper we would like to outline the advantages and disadvantages of role-play.

According to scientific researches and our own investigation the major advantage of role-play is that it is highly motivating and gives students simple direct and rapid feedback on the effects of their actions. So, the motivational aspect of role-play and simulation is the central aspect of this activity. Other basic merits of role-play are as follows: role-playing encourages creativity and helps the participants to express their feelings, attitudes, views and also to develop social skills; leads to communication and cooperation. Thus, in the process of role-playing the participants have an opportunity to present their creative ideas; learn to organize thoughts and responses instantly while reacting to a situation or question; it allows the students to play the roles of certain characters in these situations so they are able to see things from a new perspective. In a role-playing situation, students get the opportunity to practice skills they might not use on a regular basis. Skills such as debating, acting, reasoning and negotiating can be flexed in hypothetical situations when they cannot normally be used in a classic situation. Students are also able to adapt to situations they might not normally find themselves in, forcing the creativity of the students to be exerted.

One of the disadvantages of role-playing is that it requires the guidance of the teacher for better understanding and appreciation. So, to some extent it may limit the students' creativity. Another demerit of role-play is that this method may be ineffective and even harmful to those students who lack the necessary skills (those who are shy, embarrassed, unsociable, or those who have speech problems). This will cause a role-playing situation to be awkward and unproductive because one or more students will not be able to participate. When a student feels self-conscious, he will be more likely to be worried about what others will think of him, rather than how the situation can be solved. So, in this case those participants with talent and good language and social skills often monopolize the situation.

One more minus is that in larger groups, role-playing cannot be done effectively because not all of the students have the option to participate. Some role-playing scenarios use only two or three individuals in a situation, so the rest of the students just have to watch. This will cause them to become disinterested and stop paying attention. So, it is better to pick situations with maximum amount of the participants to be involved.

The success of role-playing as educational technique depends on the teacher's skill in:

- selecting a significant problem;
- presenting the problem in a manner which evokes a response from the class;
- assigning the roles to individuals who can identify with them;
- stopping the action before the situation becomes disturbing or uncomfortable for the participants and before the action loses its impact;
- leading a follow-up discussion which evaluates both the feelings experienced by those taking the roles and the solutions or outcomes which they choose.

Thus, the problem selected for role-playing must be within the experience or observation of the students. Too often unsuccessful role-playing is the result of the problem having significance for the teacher rather than for the class members [3, p. 78]. In this case we may say rather about a failure than a success.

Judging from our own experience role-play can be a particularly effective way of providing practice for the participants on a Business English course, and it is invariably popular. Here are some reasons of the including this activity in Business English courses. First of all, the change of activity during the lessons is always welcomed by participants and will help to keep the sessions lively and interesting, as well as keeping the participants alert and active. Secondly, role-play gives the participants the opportunity to practice the new language that they have been working on in the course and also helps to make them aware of gaps in their knowledge and the language that they need to practice and learn. Another essential reason is that role-play can help the teacher to assess the progress of the participants; as they are fully involved in their activity the mediator can observe their actions and also keep a check on their language and discuss some of the points arising from the observations in the feedback session after the role play.

In our paper we would like to point out some examples of role-play activities that would be appropriate in Business English classes with small and large group of students.

Situation 1

Person A is the designer of a new style of cordless iron for the home and he is looking for a manufacturer;

Person B is the managing director of a manufacturing company but is sceptical about this product.

Situation 2

Person A is the managing director (MD) of a small company;

Person B is the advertising director and wants to advertise the products on television.

The MD is keen on advertising in newspapers and is unconvinced about the value of television advertising (in terms of costs and returns) so B has to try to persuade the MD.

Situation 3

Person A sells clothes but doesn't like products made of fur. However, her company is losing money.

Person B produces products such as short jackets, stoles, gloves and belts made of fur.

Person B has to try to persuade *Person A* to sell his products. There are high profit margins in fur products.

Situation 4

Person A You are a working man/woman who has a large family. You are at work. Your boss wants to talk with you.

Person B You are a manager. You have an employee that hasn't been performing well. He/she is often late. He/she also spends a lot of time checking his/her private emails and strange websites instead of doing work. Yesterday, you caught her/him sleeping at his/her desk. Please fire the employee (in a nice way).

Situation 5

Person A You are a manager. You are in your office. Your best employee knocks on your door. He/she wants to talk with you.

Person B You are at work. Please tell your boss that you have accepted a position at another company, so you will be leaving the company in 2 weeks.

Situation 5

Person A You are a boss. Tell your employees that because of the economic crisis, they will be taking a 20 % pay cut. This pay cut actually started last month, but you forgot to tell them. Also, you will need them to come in on the weekends for the next few months, until things get better.

Person B You are at work. Your lovely boss has an announcement.

Situation 6

Person A You are the manager of a busy company. One of your employees wants to talk with you.

Person B Your boss has been forcing you to work more and more overtime every week. You have also been given many extra responsibilities that do not fall under your job description. You haven't been able to spend much time with your family, and your husband/wife is threatening to divorce you. Please talk to your boss.

Situation 7

The Scenario: Barbara owns a small home goods boutique that has been open for several years. Soon, she won't be able to spend as much time in the shop because of family concerns. Now she must choose between her top 3 associates to take on a new role as a manager.

The Roles: The 4 roles required for this are The Shop Owner, The Well Known Designer, The Top Salesperson, and The Former Shop Manager.

The Well Known Designer:

You are a well known interior designer with many high profile clients. You believe you should be the manager because you have more connections than any of the other associates. These connections can bring more business into the shop.

The Top Salesperson:

Since the first day the shop has been open, you have been the top salesperson. You have shown that you have the ability to work well with customers. You believe that you can train the other associates to sell as good as you can.

The Former Shop Manager:

You are the newest employee in the shop but you also have the most experience in the home goods industry. In the past, you worked for a direct competitor of the shop as a store manager. You believe your previous experience should be the main reason to choose you as the manager.

The Shop Owner:

Make a list of 3-5 questions to ask each associate. Listen carefully and take notes while each person is speaking. After asking each person the questions, you must decide which person will be the best for the manager's position. You will be required to explain your choice to the group. There is no wrong or right answer.

Teacher's Role: As the teacher, your role is to direct and observe this role play. Be sure to take notes of any errors and mistakes that arise. Also pay attention to speech that is awkward that could be said more easily in another way. Encourage students to think on the spot even if the answer to the shop owner's questions aren't written down on their role card.

Follow Up Questions: What do you think matters most; personal connections, sales achievement, or previous experience?

If you had to choose someone other than yourself to take the manager position, who would you choose?

What was the most important factor in choosing the manager?

How do you think most promotion decisions are made?

What was the most difficult question that the store owner asked? Why was it difficult?

Conclusion: Role-play is a simulation exercise where persons take on assumed roles in order to act out a scenario in a contrived setting. The participants can act out the assigned roles in order to explore the scenario, apply skills (maybe communication, negotiation, debate etc.), experience the scenario from another view point, evoke and understand emotions that maybe alien to them. It helps to make sense of theory and gathers together the concepts into a practical experience.

In sum, many varied aspects of role-playing have been investigated by researches. Considering the volume of research that has been carried out in relation to role-playing games and their effect on the players, and the education process on the whole, broader studies are to be carried out and a greater number of problems have to be examined.

References:

1. Ilieva, A. (2012) Cultural Languages of Role-playing. *International Journal of Role-playing*, Issue 4, 26-38.
2. Blatner, A. (1995). Drama in Education as Mental Hygiene: A Child Psychiatrist's Perspective. *Youth Theatre Journal*, 9, 92-96.
3. Westerville E. C. (1958). Role-playing: An Educational Technique. *Marriage and Family Living Journal*, 20(1), 78-80. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/347373>
4. Marry van Ments. (1999). The Effective Use of Role-play. Practical Techniques for Improving Learning. Second Edition, London: Kogan Page.
5. Curran, N (2011). Stereotypes and Individual Differences in Role-playing Games. *International Journal of Role-playing*, Issue 2, 44-58.
6. Shapiro, Sh & Leopold, L. (2012). A Critical Role for Role-Playing in Pedagogy. *TESL Canada Journal*, 29(2), 120-130.

У статті проведено огляд досліджень в області методології рольової гри. Обґрунтовано значення рольової гри у сучасному освітньому процесі та з'ясовано причини, за яких цей метод набув популярності і став одним із ефективних за останнє десятиліття. Визначено базові засади, переваги й недоліки рольових ігор, обґрунтовано доцільність використання рольової гри на заняттях із дисципліни «Ділова іноземна мова». Наведено приклади ігрових ситуацій, які можна використати на заняттях із дисципліни «Ділова іноземна мова».

Ключові слова: рольова гра, учасник рольової гри, моделювання, переваги й недоліки рольових ігор, навички, метод навчання.

В статье проведен обзор исследований в области методологии ролевой игры. Обосновано значение ролевой игры в современном образовательном процессе и выяснены причины, способствующие популярности и эффективности этого метода за последнее десятилетие. Определены базовые принципы, преимущества и недостатки ролевых игр, обоснована целесообразность использования ролевой игры на занятиях по предмету «Деловой иностранный язык». Приведены примеры игровых ситуаций, которые можно использовать на занятиях по предмету «Деловой иностранный язык».

Ключевые слова: ролевая игра, участник ролевой игры, моделирование, преимущества и недостатки ролевых игр, навыки, метод обучения

This article aims to provide a comprehensive review of research in the area of role-playing methodology. The paper will also examine the significance of role-play in modern education process and explore why this type of education technique has become rather prominent and effective from recent decades. We define the basic

advantages and disadvantage of role-play. We describe several role-play activities that we successfully implemented in Business English classes.

Key words: *role-play, role-player (participant), role-playing game, simulation, advantages (merits) and disadvantages (demerits) of role-play, skills, educational technique.*