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**ROLE-PLAYING EXERCISES  
AS A METHOD OF TEACHING  
COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS**

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The article is devoted to the analysis of role-playing activities in their combination with the other English language teaching techniques at all the stages of an English lesson. The set of role-playing activities efficient for the development of communicative skills has been offered.

**Key words:** communicative skills, discussion games, role-playing exercises.

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**Щербина В.В. Рольові ігри як метод навчання комунікативних умінь.** Стаття присвячена аналізу рольових ігор у поєднанні з іншими методами навчання англійської мови на різних етапах уроку іноземної мови. Запропоновано низку вправ, найбільш ефективних для розвитку комунікативних умінь студентів.

**Ключові слова:** ігри-дискусії, комунікативні вміння, рольові вправи.

**Щербина В.В. Рольовые игры как метод обучения коммуникативным умениям.** Статья посвящена анализу использования ролевых игр в сочетании с другими методами обучения английскому языку на разных стадиях урока иностранного языка. Предложен ряд упражнений, наиболее эффективных для развития коммуникативных умений студентов.

**Ключевые слова:** игры-дискуссии, коммуникативные умения, ролевые игры.

Role-playing exercises are one of the oldest educational technologies, having been used from an early age. It's not only children that like playing games. Adults like playing games too. At English lessons teachers use all sorts of role-playing exercises, game-like discussions as well as game-like exercises that lead to discussion and get everybody involved in the process. The degree of learner's activity depends on the type of material they are working on and methods a teacher may use. For learners, who are studying English in a non-English speaking setting, it is very important to exercise real communicative situations in which they learn to express their own views and attitudes and in which they are taken seriously as personalities.

Role-playing exercises may be especially efficient for the development of learners' communicative skills. They can be used for discussion of serious questions as well as for playing with the ideas and language. The main intention of all these exercises is to get students to talk and to stimulate their interest and imagination. Many of role-playing exercises are concerned with learners themselves. Their feelings, thoughts, emotions and ideas are the focal point of these activities.

Since foreign language teaching should help students achieve some kind of communicative skills in a foreign language, all situations, in which real communication occurs, have to be taken advantage of and to be created.

Role-playing exercises as a method of foreign language teaching have been the object of research in the studies of such foreign linguists as

A. Davison [3], L. Howe [4], M. Howe [4], K. Jones [5], F. Klippel [6], W. Lee [7] and many others. The works by A. Davison and K. Jones are devoted to the analysis of role plays and simulations as the important element in modern teaching of foreign language for special purposes. The classification proposed is based upon the area of foreign language application.

L. Howe and M. Howe take into consideration human relationships in the English learning classroom, which are essential for efficient studying. The set of role-playing exercises, worked out by the scientists, is based on the principle of values clarification approach.

W. Lee investigates the role of games, the advantages and adequacy of their use at various stages of the lesson. The linguist presents language games for English learners of all the levels and age groups.

Let's have a closer look at these exercises offered to complement traditional foreign language lessons and make them more interesting and lively.

**The aim** of this article is to define the way role-playing exercises function at different stages of the English lesson, to offer a set of exercises especially efficient in the development of learners' communicative skills.

As the experience of foreign language teaching shows, students enjoy playing games because role playing combines action, challenge and a lot of fun. If we let students play using the English language, every time they will be looking forward to the next English lesson. Games are a lot of fun even if they are not played in order to score points.

While learning English students have to work together in a group. The first essential requirement for the use of role playing activities is a relaxed and friendly atmosphere in a group. Only then the aims of these activities can be achieved.

Role-playing can be used at each stage of a lesson as a warming up, as autonomous exercises or as a test.

As we know, warming-up games are suitable for getting students into the right mood before starting on some new projects or tasks. They may demand simple questions and answers but the language content can be easily adapted to a higher level of proficiency. Warming-up games can be organized both in big groups and in pairs. Pair work is good enough for beginners and for advanced learners. It is also very important, that working in pairs seems to be the least stressful and threatening  $\Rightarrow$  for students,

and they really enjoy it very much. As an example of a warming-up activity we can offer the game “Back to back”. For most students nothing is more tedious than learning vocabulary lists. The game called “Back to Back” is used to develop speaking skills and may help check students’ knowledge of the topic “Appearance” as well as show how observant your students are. The game consists of two steps.

Step 1: Two participants come up and stand back to back.

Step 2: Each student is to describe his opponent and use as many details as possible.

In the course of the game students are allowed to keep making statements as long as they are correct.

As soon as one player mentions something that is wrong, it is his partner’s turn to start describing him.

Another example of a warming-up activity may be the game called “Optimists and Pessimists”, which can be played in bigger groups. This game can be used to develop both communicative skills and students’ grammar competence. Students may be asked to make their statements depending on the grammar material taken into consideration at the moment.

Step 1: The students are divided into two teams – “Optimists” and “Pessimists”.

Step 2: The students from the team “Optimists” are to prepare statements from the optimistic point of view. The statements may be connected with any topic, the students are interested in.

Step 3: One player from the team, representing optimists, begins by giving a statement.

Step 4: Then the student from the other team is to reply from the pessimistic point of view. The pessimists’ task is to be more reasonable and argumentative than their opponents.

Step 5: The teams change their roles.

This activity doesn’t require any special preparation and may last from 5 to 15 minutes. The main aim of this game is to get students to talk and to stimulate their imagination. While playing students perform certain roles as they are to formulate and to say something, which goes against their personal viewpoints. This role-playing exercise is not a game in the narrow sense, in some degree, it looks like a game-like discussion.

The role-playing exercises are considered to be helpful and efficient in the development of learners’ communicative skills at further stages of a

lesson. As teacher's experience may show, they develop the students' autonomy in language use. Even if learners have no particular motivation to study a foreign language, a teacher may create it by using role-playing activities, which are most natural for people of different age groups.

Let's have a closer look at the role-playing activities that can be used within the main part of a lesson for introduction and explanation of a new theme, checking up of home assignment, summing up the results of a lesson or just for having some fun.

According to the definition, given by F. Klippel [6], the author of lots of practical guides for teachers of English, "role play is a form of games mirroring a slice of reality" [6: 121]. The linguist points out, that role plays often consist of short scenes, which are realistic and habitual for learners. Role plays may be enacted around everyday situations such as buying things, meeting people, using public transport as well as around topical problems. The choice of role plays is mainly defined by the intention to achieve effective language learning situations rather than extremely original topics. F. Klippel recommends making use of two types of material – role cards and cue cards. Role cards tell a player what person, whose role he is to perform, is like. Sometimes it may seem much easier to express the thoughts of another person than to speak about yourself. The activity, based on the use of role cards, may be connected with the process of image-making, especially popular nowadays. Many people want or have to change their image according to the situations in which they find themselves. The role play "Public image of a successful politician" may be the example of such activity. The role cards may be the following:

1. A candidate for an important election, a little bit shy, modest and reserved.
2. Public relations consultant: self-confident, professional, sociable.
3. Journalist: funny, amusing, energetic, witty.
4. Stylist: sophisticated, charming, attractive.
5. Secretary: friendly, helpful, sociable.
6. Psychologist: observant, shrewd.

A teacher may think of the other roles himself. The role play may last 15 – 20 minutes and may be aimed at developing students' communicative skills as well as their grammar competence.

Step 1: A candidate for an important election is interviewed by a journalist.

Step 2: The journalist tells a future politician that his chances of success are compromised by his bad public image.

Step 3: The candidate discusses the situation with his secretary and they decide to invite a public relations consultant.

Step 4: The specialists in image-making start working.

Step 5: The results of the work and the changes in future politician's image are noticeable.

Step 6: The journalist is interviewing the candidate again. He is amazed by the results he can see.

Although students get certain roles, they may express themselves without any restrictions. The material necessary for this role-playing exercise may be more varied and complicated. This activity may be adapted to suit the needs and interests of students.

The second type of material suitable for role playing contains cue cards, which differ from role cards as they guide the players as to what they should say.

The role play "Telephoning" can demonstrate the use of these cards. In this activity a player is to talk on the telephone with several people. His task is not only to use the language correctly and adequately, but also to sound friendly and polite.

Step 1: A player is in a hurry because you are going out in half an hour to meet your friend. He is to get ready, to wash and dry your hair.

Step 2: The telephone rings. The player is to answer quickly and try not to offend a person calling.

Step 3: The moment the player start getting irritated, the game finishes. The examples of cue cards are given below:

- a. You are a player's pal. Your boyfriend has just left you, you desperately need someone to talk. You ring up your friend, you expect her to support you.
- b. You are studying for an important exam next week and are just struggling with a difficult book. You need your friend's help.
- c. You have just come home from the most fantastic weekend trip you have ever had. You went to a log cabin on a lonely lake with your boyfriend. You are eager to tell your friend your story.
- d. You are in the kitchen baking a cake as a surprise for your parents. You forgot the ingredients and decided to call your friend.

- e. You are an elderly neighbor. You've broken your leg and can't move properly. You want your young neighbor to visit you in the evening and give a hand with housework.
- f. You are a representative of a cosmetics firm. You sound persistent as you are eager to sell something unnecessary.

Role-playing exercises can be combined with the discussion games, problem solving activities, ranking exercises and jigsaw tasks. The use of interactive games can make a lesson of a foreign language more exciting as well as more structured as role playing activities contain diverse elements in their content and procedure. As teaching practice shows, role playing exercises can help teachers create a learning environment and learning experience, which lead students to success and joy in learning.

The further research in this area is to be devoted to the analysis of simulations as a method of teaching communicative skills in its comparison with role-playing exercises.

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