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Ролевая игра как эффективное средство формирования и тестирования умений: уточняем правила проведения

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Аннотация. Статья, основанная на практическом опыте автора по подготовке будущих преподавателей иностранного языка, подчеркивает необходимость тщательного соблюдения правил подготовки и проведения ролевых игр для достижения максимальной эффективности их применения при обучении иностранным языкам. В статье предлагаются образцы профессионально ориентированных игр и методические рекомендации, которые могут способствовать повышению качества учебного занятия иностранного языка и профессиональной подготовки будущих преподавателей.

Ключевые слова: повышение квалификации учителей и преподавателей иностранного языка, ролевая игра, уместность, информационный разрыв

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Original article

Role Playing as an Efficient Teaching and Testing Technique: Updating the Rules

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Abstract. The article based on the author's experience in teacher training and teacher development looks at the rules of organizing role playing adequately to enhance the effectiveness of the technique in the foreign language classroom. The article offers sample role plays and teaching recommendations which could help improve the quality of the foreign language classroom as well as the efficiency of teacher training.

Keywords: teacher training and teacher development, role playing, appropriateness, information gap

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INTRODUCTION

Role playing has long been used in the foreign language classroom as an effective teaching technique.

Most experts define role playing as activity in which students take the roles of different participants in a situation and act out what might typically happen in that situation [Longman dictionary, 2002].

The funny thing is that not everybody believes in the efficiency of role playing and resort to the activity either just for fun or for the sake of variety. Not taking the technique seriously, many teachers fail to organize it properly or call any interaction between Student 1 and Student 2, or between Student 1 and several other Students, role playing, which is not actually true.

BASIC RULES OF ORGANIZING ROLE PLAYING : A REMINDER

Some activities are mistakenly confused with role playing, while, in fact, they are very different. Among those 'confusables' experts point out the following: acting out sketches or short plays for peers and parents; writing down and acting out skeleton dialogues or taking turns in conversational exchanges to practise some vocabulary or a language function; or group work whose aim is to practise some language pattern or answer a question [Livingstone, 1983].

Although the activities mentioned above cannot be classified as role playing proper, they can all be used while planning and getting ready for a role play.

We agree with most educationalists who think that role playing should be rather set up at the end of teaching a unit devoted to a topic and after acquiring a number of relevant language means. As a result role playing turns into a valuable testing technique: acting out a real-life situation or a situation imitating real life, students show whether they are capable of surviving in a similar situation. Role playing emphasizes the priority of social appropriateness of speech acts over linguistic competence, which is restricted to grammatically correct or well-formed sentences.

Appropriateness means choosing the most suitable of a number of nearly synonymous expressions for the occasion in question. The appropriate choice depends on such factors as the relationship between speakers, the topic under discussion and other circumstances of the interaction. This point suggests that for the role play to be successful we need to introduce the situational context very clearly and carefully. The most important element of the situation to be introduced to the participants is the

communicative purpose pursued by each of them [Heyworth, 1984].

Information gap is another important element in many communicative activities. Information gap is the principle that two (or more) students engaged in a production activity do not share exactly the same information. If the task is correctly set, the students must pool their information and are thus forced to communicate through English.

The main rule to be remembered while organizing a role play is that the scenario of a role play should be very clear and the role cards should be detailed enough.

How detailed the role card is depends on the students' level of language proficiency. The more advanced the student is, the less detailed the role card will be.

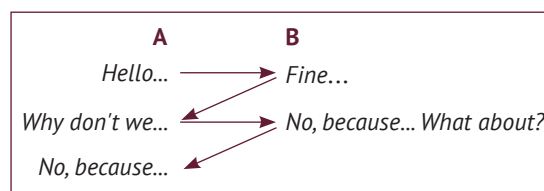
We believe that role playing is most efficient when applied to develop students' professional skills. In this case, we should rather use the term 'simulation' and incorporate role playing or simulations into the teaching programme systematically [Фролова, 1987].

Next we will introduce a few role playing activities to illustrate the topic.

Sample activity 1

Act as a teacher. Set up the following activity meant for practicing ways of making suggestions (*What about...? Why don't we...? etc.*).

- Set the scene (e.g. two friends are trying to arrange a time to discuss the climbing holiday they want to take).
- Give out the diaries, so that one has A's and the other B's, round the class. Ask the students to read them silently.
- Check that the students have understood what is written.
- Either draw a chart like the one below on the board or give it out on cards.



- Ask the students to work in pairs, each with his diary hidden from the other. You may demonstrate the beginning of the dialogue:

A: Hello, Bill, how are you?

B: Fine, thank you. Listen, we must meet this week and talk about our holiday.

- A: O.K. Why don't we see each other on a Monday afternoon?
 B: No, I can't, because I have got a dentist appointment... etc.

- Remember to re-sit the students so that they faced each other.
 Do it before you hand out the cards / diaries. *E.g.*:

A's Diary	B's Diary
Monday: Free	Monday: A dentist appointment
Tuesday: Dinner with parents	Tuesday: Free
Wednesday: Hairdresser's	Wednesday: Tennis
Thursday: Tickets for the theatre	Thursday: Tickets for the theatre
Friday: Free	Friday: Free
Saturday / Sunday: Outing	Saturday / Sunday: Free

- Choose 2–3 students who will work as supervisors and analyze the “lesson”. (The evaluation questions may help). They will try to be constructive and encouraging, concentrating on the good things first.

Evaluation Questions:

- Did the teacher manage to explain to the “students” the aim and the rules (procedure) of the activity?
- Could the teacher's directions have been clearer or briefer? If yes, suggest how.
- How much Teacher Talking Time was there as opposed to the Student Talking Time?

Sample activity 2

Act as a teacher. Plan a lesson to practice the following interaction pattern:

- A invites B. to (go to the cinema, watch a football match, etc.).
 B accepts or declines.

They make arrangements to meet or postpone the engagement to a later occasion, as appropriate.

In planning this lesson, *first* decide what the relationship between the speakers is, how well they know each other, etc.

Second, make a short list of language forms which are suitable to use in the circumstances. *Finally*, prepare the aids (role – cards, blackboard – sketches, etc.) you will need for the activity.

Try the lesson out on “a group of intermediate students”.

Two or three of your peers will act as supervisors and comment on your “lesson”.

Sample activity 3

Act as a teacher of an early intermediate class. Your “students” have just learnt “Let's...”, “Shall we..” and other ways of suggesting ideas, which they have practiced in controlled situations. Arrange a role – play “Planning a party”. (Make sure the “students” remember what they have previously learnt, i.e. tell them what language items they have just been practicing, prior to the role-play activity).

Sample activity 4

Act as a teacher. Set up one of the the oral practice activities described below (see the Notes for the teacher a / b / c).

- Begin by introducing the activity to the class.
- Remember to check the students understand what you are saying.
- Start the activity.
- Begin the “lesson” with the words “Right” or “Now” which the students have learnt to recognize as the cue / signal for an instruction.
- End your “lesson” as soon as the activity gets going (or at least one pair / group completes the task).

- a) The activity is meant for ‘advanced level’ students.

Notes for the teacher. The exercise GETTING A WORD IN will help you develop a skill much needed in normal conversation – learning how to direct a conversation.

Divide the students into pairs. The members of each pair are each given a different sentence on a slip of paper, which they are to memorise and not to show to their partner (e. g.: *Peter's father cooked dinner last night. My sister had a bump on her leg. The dogs keep attacking my cat*, etc.). The students are told that they have met in some public place (a street, a park). They are to go up to their partner and start a conversation. Each person tries to manipulate so as to be able to use his sentence in it naturally.

- b) The role-play is meant for “intermediate level” students.

Notes for the teacher. This exercise serves as useful introduction to many drama activities. This exercise is useful for various communicative functions (e.g. apologizing, interrupting people, arguing without hurting the other person’s feelings, etc.).

Divide the class into pairs. Give each member of a pair a role-card. The students are to conduct a telephone conversation based on the information written on the slips of paper they are given. *E. g.:*

- A: You are about to go out to catch the bus. It leaves in 5 minutes and you must not miss it.
B: You are bored and you want to have a good long talk about anything – sport, the TV last night, a new dress you’ve seen. You phone A. You must keep talking.

It is important that the students sit to-back- back for this activity, otherwise they will not be able to recreate the sense of being physically out off by the phone. Roles are exchanged afterwards. You can use the blackboard notes to have the first interchange, eventually notes should not be necessary.

- c) The exercise is meant for “intermediate level” students.

Notes for the teacher. This exercise serves as a useful introduction to many drama activities. This exercise is useful for practicing modal verbs and activating the communicative function of “expressing one’s opinion”.

Divide the class into groups of three. Give each group the picture of an unknown person. (Each group should be given a portrait, i. e. a picture showing a person in close detail). Some of these might be pictures of ordinary people in unusual surroundings, others of people with marked traits of character. (It is best to avoid photographs of well known public figures). Each group should study its portrait for 4–5 minutes and then decide:

- how old the person might be,
- what his / her profession might be,
- whether he / she is married,
- what he / she likes doing,
- what he / she is doing at the moment,
- what he / she is like as a person.

One person in each group should take notes.

When one or two interpretations have been agreed upon, the group should exchange pictures

with another group. When each group has worked on 1-2 pictures, call the class together and get them to pool their impressions. Most people, consciously or not, form opinions of others as soon as they see them. Here you must draw on this natural tendency in order to get the students to argue out an opinion. Each group begins with the same “evidence”, but interpretation may differ radically. This is why it is good to allow for a round-up session at the end.

Sample activity 5. Role-play

(organizing information gap activities)

a) Read the Notes for the Teacher and b) Do the assignment below. c) In this role-play we will look at ways of getting students to practice oral English through information gap activities. Information gap activities are those in which students are given different bits of information by sharing which they can complete a task. *E. g.:*

Geographical Information. In this activity students ask and answer questions about various towns and cities, their location, population, climate, etc. This is what the students receive:

By asking Student A. (B) questions, fill in the missing information in the chart below. (Student A. (B) will also ask you questions).

Student A:	Bath	Sydney	New Orleans
country?	Great Britain		the USA
population?		3 mln	
weather?		hot and dry	
what / like?		modern and busy	lively commercial
famous for?	The Roman Baths		jazz music

Student B:	Bath	Sydney	New Orleans
country?		Australia	
population?	85,000		600,000
weather?	mild and rainy		hot and dry
what / like?	quiet, attractive		
famous for?		the Opera House	

The students will then ask each other questions such as "What's the weather like in Sydney?", "What's the population of Bath?", etc. The activity is finished when the students have charts which are completely filled in. This is a useful activity for practicing a variety of information questions and has an advantage that the information itself is somewhat interesting.

If students have not done an exercise of this type before the teacher would be well advised to demonstrate the technique before putting the student in pairs. Thus the teacher could write a similar (but different) chart on the blackboard with different information. Then the teacher gets a student up to the front of the class. The student asks the teacher questions; the teacher gives answers and the student has to fill in the chart on the blackboard.

When the activity of this type is over the teacher can conduct feedback by getting students to ask and answer the questions. This serves to check not only the students' language production, but also whether they have got the information right.

- a) Now imagine and act out the following classroom situation.

Teachers' role-card

Imagine you are teaching a group of students who are at a fairly elementary level. Your task is to get them to oral English through an information gap activity (which is new to them).

You can make use of the example given above or design an information gap exercise of your own. Introducing the activity to the class; work out how best to explain it to the class. Remember to check the students understand your instructions. Begin by stating the aim of the activity (the class has just learnt the question forms). The description of the main stages of the information gap activity will help you to provide a clear teacher sequence for setting up an activity of the type.

Stage 1: Students are told they are going to work in pairs.

Stage 2: Students are told that each person will be given a chart he must not show to his neighbour (partner).

Stage 3: The teacher hands out the charts and tells the partners to fill in the missing parts without looking at the other person's chart.

Make sure the students know when to begin the activity (e. g. say something like "Everyone", "Now". O.K. Get on with it). Begin the role-play with the words "Right" or "Listen". And the role-play as soon as the first pair of students completes the task.

Students' role-cards

You should pretend to be at a fairly elementary level and may not always understand the first time. For example, you can a) look puzzled, b) worried, c) you can whisper to your neighbour as if you had not understood or d) put your hand up if you have a question, etc.

Remember that the activity is new to you. (!) Remember to play your role and not interrupt your "teacher" if you disagree with what he says or does. (Make a note of your objections and discuss it later on with your peers.)

CONCLUSION

Role playing is a popular foreign language technique whose true potential is not fulfilled if a role play activity is not set up properly. As a result not all students find role playing activities motivating or enjoyable. When planning a role play, it is crucial to talk around the situation and the characters, to find out what students know about the topic, what they think and feel about it. It is also advisable to stress the importance of language preparation, and a space between preparation and playing will give more fluency to the language. Teachers should also make sure that there is an information gap and a purpose to the role playing activity.

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