BENEFITS OF ROLE PLAYING ACTIVITIES
IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

Role playing is one of the most popular techniques among foreign language teachers, as implementation of this activity increases students' motivation for cognitive activity, acquiring knowledge and communicative skills in a foreign language, as well as it creates positive psychological atmosphere in a classroom. And this article deals with the advantages of using role playing activities in teaching foreign languages and in improving students' communicative skills.

Keywords: role playing, communicative language teaching, traditional approach, teacher-centered, learner-centered, real-world scenarios, language acquisition process, cultural and nonverbal behavior, low-anxiety learning environment, communication skills.

INTRODUCTION

The traditional approach to language teaching contrasts sharply with the communicative approach. Traditional Teaching Methods are the old school of teaching which were teacher-centered, old-fashioned, routine teaching. This approach concentrates on issues outside the real-life experiences of the students and it emphasizes the rules guiding the use of the target language, creating little or no provision for students to actually use this language to communicate on matters related to their daily life experiences. In other words, what the students acquire through this approach is simply the bookish knowledge of their target language.

Communicative language teaching, or the communicative approach, is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of study. Role-playing, as a communicative activity, is one of the most beneficial activities in teaching foreign languages, as well as in improving students' communication skills, in which the instructional strategies fall under the theory behind it is as using active learning device. It is a very thorough activity for applying integrated knowledge. Theory is easy to understand but we think it would be easier to

put theory into practice with the help of role-playing activity. Through role-playing students are encouraged to discuss not only theoretical concepts and situations experienced, but also feelings, values, beliefs and other emotional aspects involved in the process of care. This method contributes to giving students the confidence and peace of mind necessary to get over this "stage fright" and thus be able to take advantage of role-playing and the subsequent discussion. Students learn to assess, criticize and think about their individual teaching-learning process. It makes easier to understand the teaching-learning process regarding the difficulties that arise, the objectives achieved, Moreover, this activity helps students develop values by modeling and using real life examples, and promotes the participation of students in their evaluation process.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Studies have shown that role-play can be used effectively to improve students not only language skills, but also interpersonal and communicative skills, as well as implementation of role playing activities in teaching languages has been one of the most actual themes among most researchers who worked in the sphere of language teaching and methodology. Many scholars such as Larsen-Freeman, Van Ments, Richard Courtney, Stern, Ladousse G. and others have carried out researches on conducting role playing activities in foreign language classroom.

Larsen-Freeman pointed out in her book "Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching" that *"Role-plays are very important in the Communicative Approach because they give students an opportunity to practice communicating in different social contexts and in different social roles"*.

Ladousse offered a new understanding of role-play by redefining it as *"an educational technique, known to generate a lot of fun, excitement, joy and laughter in the language class as 'play' itself guarantees a safe environment in which learners can be as inventive and playful as possible"* and he indicated that *"role play is one of a whole gamut of communicative techniques which develops fluency in language students, which promotes interaction in the classroom, and which increases motivation".* In addition, he pointed out that role-play encourages peer learning and sharing the responsibility for learning between teacher and student. He suggested role play to be "perhaps the most flexible technique in the range" of communicative techniques, and with suitable and effective role-play exercises, teachers can meet an infinite variety of needs. So, role play exercises "are usually short, spontaneous

presentations" but also can be prearranged research assignments. They can be effectively used in the classroom to:

⚲ *Motivate and engage students*

⚲ *Enhance current teaching strategies*

⚲ *Provide real-world scenarios to help students learn*

⚲ *Learn skills used in real-world situations (negotiation, debate, teamwork, cooperation, persuasion)*

⚲ *Provide opportunities for critical observation of peers*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Role playing activities are usually more successful if they involve problem solving or if there is a task to be carried out, rather than simply acting out a situation until it runs out of momentum. The effective use of different types of role-playing activities can enable the teacher to provide students with the opportunity to practice the target language in a variety of meaningful contexts. By practising the target language in different roles, students consolidate and review their knowledge of word order, phrasing, and punctuation that contributes to the meaning of a written sentence. The use of role-playing in learning and practising a conversation not only consolidates the students' knowledge of certain vocabulary and grammar used in similar situations but also brings home to the students some aspects of behaviors, such as the skills of starting a conversation and the development of good human relations. Therefore, role-play clearly promotes effective interpersonal relations and social transactions among participants.

There are usually *three stages* to doing a role play in class:

1. Teacher prepares the children for the role play by setting up the situation and making sure the children have the necessary language.

2. Children do the role play

3. Teacher observes them noting down comments in preparation

At this point, it is important not to interfere unless absolutely necessary. Once the role playing is finished, the teacher organizes reflection and feedback:

- ***on the process*** *(how the children did the activity)*

- ***on the*** **product** (how it turned out)

In practice, *the basic steps in preparing a role playing* could be to:

⚲ introduce or elicit and practice the language the children need;

⚲ introduce the characters: here you might give the children a role card with the information they need to play their role;

⚲ introduce the situation and present the children with the task;

⚲ practice some typical dialogues in a more controlled environment;

⚲ do the role play;

⚲ feedback from the teacher and children: how did the children do the task and how well did they complete it?

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 shy students. Also since role-play is much like doing a mini-drama, the students know that they are not displaying their own personalities. 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.

During my lessons I have tried to let students act out several short plays adapted from children's favorite story books. Students love acting and playing, but lines normally take a lot of time and efforts for students to learn, practice and memorize. So, instead of asking students to perform an entire story, I tried to extract some situations and dialogs from teaching materials and have students act out some dramatic situations. Students played characters and said their lines aloud. It is much easier to teach vocabulary, lines, and the dramatic elements needed for a role play situation than to teach the elements of an entire play. In addition, by letting students practice in pairs or small groups, every student can be involved in the role-play exercises and enjoy the benefits of role-play.

CONCLUSION

In Conclusion we want to say that role playing activity is an essential part of the learning process, as it engages students in real-life situations or scenarios that can be "stressful, unfamiliar, complex, or controversial" which requires them to examine personal feelings toward others and their circumstances. Moreover, implementation of role playing activities in language teaching is pivotal, as:

⚲ It enables students to learn and practice the target language in meaningful context;

⚲ It improves students' different skills needed for the language acquisition process;

⚲ It motivates students to be interested and involved in learning;

➤ It creates low-anxiety learning environments for students;

➤ It offers students a variety of experiences and improves their 4 language skills;

➤ It helps to improve students' cultural and nonverbal behavior.

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