

## **Second Language Acquisition through Task-based Approach – Role-play in English Language Teaching**

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### **Abstract**

Language teaching is not just about teaching languages, it is also about helping students to develop themselves as people. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) proposes the use of tasks as a central component in the language classroom because they provide better contexts for activating learner acquisition processes and promoting second language learning. Task-Based language teaching has attracted the attention of second language learning which was coined and later developed by second language researchers and educators in reaction to other teacher-dominated, form-oriented methods. Role play is a technique in which students are presented with a real or artificial environment and they are exposed with some kind of case or situation and they need to exhibit the same in form of roles. A brief outline of task-based teaching and a brief historical sketch of role-play is given in this paper. This paper focuses on the need of task-based language teaching in classrooms and role play as an instructive method which serves as a multi-skill developing weapon where the students not only develop a broader perspective about a task or new role but also the horizon of understanding others behavior resulting into empathy, team work, better communication, interpersonal skills and management development.

**Keywords:** Task-based teaching, Role-play.

### **Introduction**

English becomes the most essential language in the world. Almost all the people from many different countries around the world use it to communicate. The area of English has always become a special interest. Among the recent innovations in the field of second language teaching, task-based language teaching is probably the most promising and productive one, the one which has drawn much attention from both second language teaching profession and second

language researchers. Task is “...an activity which involves the use of language but in which the focus is on the outcome of the activity rather than on the language used to achieve that outcome.”

Role-play is an effective technique to animate the teaching and learning atmosphere, arouse the interests of learners, and make the language acquisition impressive. Role play is very important in teaching English because it gives students an opportunity to practice communicating in different social contexts and in different social roles. In addition, it also allows students to be creative and to put themselves in another person’s place for a while. According to Stephen D. Hattings based on his observation in the conversation class, the role play would seem to be the ideal activity in which students could use their English creatively and it aims to stimulate a conversation situation in which students might find themselves and give them an opportunity to practice and develop their communication skill.

### **Why use a task-based approach?**

- Tasks can be easily related to students’ real-life language needs.
- Tasks create contexts that facilitate second language acquisition (i.e. an L2 is best learned through communicating).
- Tasks create opportunities for focusing on form.
- Students are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation in a task-based approach.
- A task-based approach enables teachers to see if students are developing the ability to communicate in an L2.

### **History of role-play**

The idea of play as a medium for instruction can be traced back to the Greeks. Probably the first role-play session was run when a master teaching a pupil, said to him: ‘Act as if I am a customer and you are serving me’. The pupil played his role. The master played his role as a would-be-customer. When they discussed their roles afterwards, play was used as method of instruction (Corsini, Shaw & Blake, 1961). The Viennese psychiatrist Moreno was the first to examine role-play in a scientific way (Corsini, Shaw & Blake, 1961). Moreno (1946) created the sociometric measure, a technique that studies interpersonal attraction and group membership in institutional settings (e.g., reform schools). He used role-play for psychiatric objectives. These plays are known under the names of psychodrama and sociodrama. In psychodrama, the enactment and its emotional and behavioral confrontations are the central activity; discussion and

analysis are minimal (Joyce & Weil, 1980). Another origin can be found in Germany in the 1920s (Corsini, Shaw & Blake, 1961; Wohlking & Gill, 1980). The educational use of role-play became more and more widespread. During the 1970s and 1980s the use of role-play increased even further and role-play is now common-place in university curricula, business, and industrial training programs.

### **Reasons for using Role-plays in Class**

There are many good reasons for using role-plays in class:

- role-plays help students cope with real-life situations, commonly used expressions, forcing them to think “on their feet”;
- role-plays help students work together as a team or group, and communicate in order to understand each other, because role-plays are not simple acts of reading or reproduction the information from a piece of paper;
- role-plays can be adapted to the needs of the students, they may use specific vocabulary for specific situations, as learning English is sometimes done for a specific purpose;
- role-plays give learners more responsibility in their learning, encouraging interaction;
- role-plays offer students the chance to evaluate their learning progress and their level of English.

Role play can improve learners speaking skills in any situation, and helps learners to interact. As for the shy learners, role play helps by providing a mask, where learners with difficulty in conversation are liberated. In addition, it is fun and most learners will agree that enjoyment leads to better learning.

### **How to teach using Role-play?**

- The teacher should prepare the students by asking questions before performing a role play.
- The questions should incorporate the major parts of the role play and the vocabulary/idioms involved. After the question answer session the students should be comfortable with what they need to do.

- Allow the students a few minutes to study the role cards and work out some key sentences. The teacher can help the students where ever needed.
- Each role play should be performed at least twice with the students changing roles.
- In group situations the stronger students can act out the role play to the whole class.
- The teacher can take one of the roles if needed.
- Avoid making corrections until the role play is finished.

### **Role-play Cards**

Role play cards can be a very useful tool. Role-play cards invite students to assume the role of a specific person or character and to react to a stimulus or prompt as that person.

### **Values of Role-plays**

Role playing allows people to make mistakes in a nonthreatening environment. They can test several solutions to very realistic problems, and the application is immediate. It also fulfills some of the very basic principles of the teaching-learning process such as learner involvement and intrinsic motivation. A positive climate often results in which one can see himself as others see him.

The involvement of the role playing participants can create both an emotional and intellectual attachment to the subject matter at hand. Role playing can often create a sense of community within the class.

### **Problems in Role Playing**

The major drawback in role playing is the insecurity of class members. Some may react negatively to participating in a situation which will be discussed and possibly criticized by other members of the class. And role playing takes time. The class discussion of a five-to-ten-minute role playing situation may extend to several times the length of the situation itself.

The relationship of the people in the group is a crucial factor in the success of role playing. At times it may emerge as a negative factor. For example, previous interpersonal difficulties

experienced by group members may arise in class to corrupt the role playing situation. Also, if the group has people of different status, they may be reluctant to become involved for fear of being humiliated before the members of the class who are smarter or more popular.

These difficulties with the method are formidable, but they are not insurmountable. Nor are they so extensive that they should prohibit us from experimenting with role playing. The potential benefits of the method quickly overbalance the difficulties which seem so apparent in the initial preparation stages.

### **The Role of a Teacher**

Some of the possible teacher roles are:

**Facilitator** - students may need new language to be 'fed' in by the teacher. If rehearsal time is appropriate the feeding in of new language should take place at this stage. As students practice the role-play they might find that they are stuck for words and phrases. In the practice stage the teacher has a chance to 'feed-in' the appropriate language. This may need the teacher to act as a sort of 'walking dictionary', monitoring the class and offering assistance as and when necessary.

**Spectator** - The teacher watches the role-play and offers comments and advice at the end.

**Participant** - It is sometimes appropriate to get involved and take part in the role-play yourself.

### **Error Correction**

There are many ways to correct mistakes when using role-play. It is rarely appropriate for the teacher to jump in and correct every mistake. This could be incredibly de-motivating! Some students do like to be corrected straight after a role-play activity, while the language is still fresh in their minds. Sentences with errors can be written on the board for the group to correct together.

**Self-correction** - If you have the equipment to record the role-plays either on audiocassette or on video, students can be given the opportunity to listen to the dialogue again and reflect on the language used. They may find it easy to spot their own mistakes.

**Peer-correction** - Fellow students may be able to correct some mistakes made by their peers. Students could be asked to listen out for both great bits of language they'd like to use themselves, and some mistakes they hear. Be careful to keep peer-correction a positive and profitable experience for all involved. Making a note of common mistakes yourself and dealing with them in future classes ensures that the students don't lose motivation by being corrected on the spot or straight after the role-play. Negotiate with students and ask them how they would like to be corrected.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, incorporating role-play into the classroom adds variety, a change of pace and opportunities for a lot of language production and also a lot of fun! It can be an integral part of the class and not a 'one-off' event. It's fun and motivating; quieter students get the chance to express themselves in a more forthright way; the world of the classroom is broadened to include the outside world - thus offering a much wider range of language opportunities. In addition to these reasons, students who will at some point travel to an English speaking country are given a chance to rehearse their English in a safe environment. Real situations can be created and students can benefit from the practice. Mistakes can be made with no drastic consequences. Role-playing can boost self-esteem, increase classroom morale, encourage participation and create confidence. Children who engage in creative learning learn faster, retain more of what they learn, and are more prone to apply their learning outside the classroom. The techniques of role playing afford another approach to involving students in their own learning process toward the clarification of self concepts, evaluation of behavior, and aligning of that behavior with reality.

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