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ROLE-PLAY AS A METHOD OF DEVELOPING STUDENTS' FOREIGN SPEAKING SKILLS

The article deals with the problem of using role-playing as a method of developing students' foreign language speaking skills.

A wide range of role-play activities have been considered. Role play activities range from highly-controlled guided conversations at one end of the scale, to improvised drama activities at the other; from simple rehearsed dialogue performance, to highly complex simulated scenarios.

During any role-playing, each student is assigned a particular role to play. Every participant is attributed a role card with information about their roles and further instructions.

The example of implementation of role-play techniques in the EFL classroom has been demonstrated.

It has been revealed that role-play is one of the most efficient strategies in the repertoire of an EFL teacher who is looking for meaningful ways to empower his students in the foreign language.

Key words: *role-playing, role cards, real play, surreal play, foreign speaking skills, foreign language teaching, EFL classroom.*

In recent years there has been noted a renewed interest in enhancing communicative approach in teaching a foreign language. Language-teaching professionals continue insisting on making classroom language more communicative.

One of the most efficient strategies in the repertoire of an EFL teacher who is looking for meaningful ways to empower his students in the foreign language is implementation of interactive approaches. Students are required to participate actively in discussing and sharing their own knowledge. The teacher, who is still very important to the process, becomes the helper rather than the master.

The success of developing students' foreign language speaking skills is connected with the way the foreign language lessons are organized. Using new and interesting teaching methods at the lessons, creative tasks as well as communicative exercises helps develop students' interest to learning a foreign language, their positive attitude and helps create a favourable psychological atmosphere during the lessons. One of the most efficient teaching

techniques is role-playing. It is considered a means of optimizing students' learning activity helping to model situations of real communication and serves as a natural means of students' understanding of the surrounding world.

The aim of the article is to research role-playing as a method of developing students' speaking skills.

The problem of using role-playing as a method of developing students' foreign language speaking skills has been researched by Ukrainian as well as foreign scientists. V. Artemov and H. Yatskovska dedicated their research to the analysis of the peculiarities of role-playing as a teaching method and point out its main features. E. Passov and D. Elkonin described the structure of role-playing. This method of teaching has also been researched by H. Kasparova, H. Kytaihorodska and V. Bukhbinder.

According to Porter-Ladousse [9], role play activities range from highly-controlled guided conversations at one end of the scale, to improvised drama activities at the other; from simple rehearsed dialogue performance, to highly complex simulated scenarios. The scholar puts a lot of emphasis on a wide range of role-play activities. For instance, a speaking task may be supported by prepared prompts, like dialogues, or, conversely, role-play might be an activity where students rather improvise than rely on the memorized dialogues. Porter-Ladousse also points out that role-play may differ in complexity, that is, some performances may be very short and simple, whereas some utterances may be very structured. The difficulty of the activity depends, therefore, on the language level of the speaker.

During any role-playing, each student is assigned a particular role to play. Scrivener [6] stresses the importance of role cards assigned to the participants with information about their roles and further instructions. Guidelines put on such cards help students in conveying important facts about their characters to be played and also make the speakers feel more secure, as basic clues are included on paper. The weaker learners may base their utterances on a card per se, while the stronger ones find role cards as prompts. A good set of role cards is frequently designed so that the participants may have different points of view and obvious disagreements. The author tends to believe that students need an appropriate amount of time to prepare ideas and language before playing the roles. What is more, learners not only use the ideas put on role cards, but also try to develop the content.

There are two different types of role-play, that is to say, real plays and surreal plays. According to Balan [4], a role-play activity which is a rehearsal for the real world is called real play. Therefore, textual material should be authentic and realia may be brought into the classroom. Moreover, real playing fits in the desire for realism because it gives students the chance to practise typical activities they will probably perform in real life (ordering food in a restaurant, greetings, asking for directions, booking holidays at a travel agency, etc.). Thanks to this kind of role-playing, learners have a possibility to rehearse these activities. The author states that in real life, they may have fewer problems in communication because of the experience they gained in the classroom.

In sharp contrast to real play, Balan introduces the surreal play which should encourage an imaginative self-expression of the inner world of each student's mind [4]. While real play seeks approval for believing that a classroom can become the real world, surreal playing calls for promoting an expression of thoughts and feelings of each student. Such an activity is also called imaginative role-playing.

As stated by Doff, not only children fantasize, but also teenagers and adults often imagine themselves in different situations. In this case, teachers let students do what they naturally find enjoyable [7, 240].

The distinction between role-play and simulation is very often of small attention and even omitted. These speaking activities may often overlap in practice and different authors give different definitions, but, regardless of role-play and simulation similarities, one should remember that there is a difference.

Role-playing, as any teaching sequence, necessitates three vital elements: the engaging stage, the study stage and activating stage. In the first phase, the teacher's task is to attract and keep learners' attention and interest in a lesson. Students' minds have to be involved and emotionally connected with a lesson, for example by a pleasant situation or a nice picture. When learners need to study the new language material, it may be grammar or vocabulary exercises. Learning the new material, students are given a possibility to activate both the new language and the language they have known. Engaged in the activity, practicing the new language material learners try to activate it. The author indicates that role-playing is an excellent way to put the language into action [4].

Doff [7] states that if role-play is not based on a dialogue in a course book or a given text, students themselves have to decide what language to use and how a conversation should develop. Therefore, to achieve the efficiency of the activity, careful preparation would be essential. The educator may cause brainstorming in the classroom on what the speakers may say. Also, writing prompts on the board and necessary vocabulary may guide students during role-play.

In Budden's view, memorizing the language material the players would need to use is very helpful, as learners are provided with suitable language material [6].

It is also worth remembering that the teacher should make sure that students have understood both the situation to play and also what is on the role cards before the activity begins. If learners follow the activity, they will not have problems with conducting the activity properly. It is necessary that the role cards be legible and within students' language level [1].

Huang [8] suggests that the teacher should assess the effectiveness of the role-play activity and check if learners have successfully comprehended the meaning of vocabulary, sentences and dialogues. Learners should be given oral and listening tests related to the role-plays. The players may be asked to answer some questions connected with their roles, repeat some parts of utterances, or translate the role-play into their native language. Apart from that, the teacher's task is to evaluate students' understanding and comprehension while monitoring their role-play performances [8].

If to speak about the reasons for incorporating role-playing in EFL classes, it should be mentioned that, performing certain roles in role-playing activities, students get ready to the specific roles in life. They may want to work or travel in worldwide context. It is very advantageous for these students to practice in the classroom environment the language material they will presumably use in everyday life. For such learners, role-play is a helpful rehearsal and what is more, it allows them not just to acquire phrases, but to learn how to interact in a variety of circumstances [10].

Moreover, role-playing develops every learner's imagination. As far as the roles given to learners may require creative thinking, the player's imagination is in high demand. In addition, being able to think inventively might turn out to be a useful skill in the future. Some jobs demand imaginative thinking and the best way to practise is just through role-playing as well as by reading books.

Another advantage of role-playing is that learners are given a chance to pretend someone else. Reticent students often have difficulty talking about their experiences or about themselves. The fact that they are someone else makes them feel that their own personality is

not implicated. Such a technique may help timid students to overcome their shyness of speaking.

Brown stresses the role of the teacher as a facilitator in the process of the role play. As learners practice a role-play, they may experience the shortage of the vocabulary needed for the successful performance [6]. They may need help from the educator. This role makes the teacher act as a kind of a «walking dictionary», offering help when it is necessary. However, if rehearsal time is long enough, offering assistance might not be required.

Another role of the teacher is being a spectator. His or her task is to watch the role-play and then give remarks and advice at the end of the performances. The teacher walks round the classroom listening to the students talking and putting down the mistakes that should be discussed [9].

Porter-Ladousse claims that after the role-play, the teacher can correct the mistakes the learners made by writing them on the board, or by giving some kind of remedial task predicted to be needed. The author puts emphasis on the fact that while role-play is in progress, the error correction is irrelevant as far as the first priority is developing fluency [9].

Our intention is to share our experience in implementation of role-play techniques in the EFL classroom. Let us proceed with some sample activity offered by O. Serniak [3] we successfully use in our EFL classrooms.

Treasuring the Tundra

You are participants of a radio talk for young children.

Group 1

Student A. You are the host of the radio program for young children. Your guest speakers today are John Bennett, Patricia Dymond and Felicity O'Dell – the environmentalists dealing with North Pole areas.

Student B You are John Bennett, the scientist studying permafrost.

Student C You are Patricia Dymond, the botanist studying the flora of the tundra.

Student D You are Felicity O'Dell, the zoologist studying the fauna of the tundra.

You are the guest speakers. You are specially qualified in all issues of the tundra. You are here today to discuss the problem of safeguarding the tundra.

Group 2

You are young listeners of the program who are interested in the discussion and would like to inquire about the area you heard something but don't know much in particular.

Listener 1

You are Henry, a boy of seven. Everything you know about the tundra that it is cold. You would like to know more about it.

Listener 2

You are Sandra. Being a young girl of ten you like geography. Unfortunately you haven't studied the tundra at the lessons of Geography yet. You want to know if it is true that there isn't any wildlife in the tundra because of the permafrost.

Listener 3

You are Ella, 10. You want to know what plants exist in the tundra and how they survive in such extreme conditions. You also would like to know what trees grow in the tundra.

Listener 4

You are Carla, 12 years old of age. You are almost sure that only small animals live in the tundra. You want to know what other animals exist in the tundra.

Listener 5

You are Michelle, 12. You are aware that reindeer and arctic foxes live in the tundra but it's a surprise for you that wolves live in the tundra. You want to know if any people live in the tundra.

Listener 6

You are Mathew, a boy of 12. You know that the tundra is far away from big cities where people live. Why is it so important to study this area?

Listener 7

You are Jenny. You are 12 years old. You've heard a lot about pollution everywhere around us. Is there any pollution in the tundra?

In conclusion, role-play is an effective means of developing students' foreign speaking skills, enhancing their interest in mastering a foreign language as well as a means of creating a positive and friendly atmosphere during the lessons of EFL. Using cards and other visual aids in the process of role-play makes it more effective and encourages cooperation between students. Proper preparation for role-playing at the lessons leads to students' active participation and helps improve their foreign language skills.

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