



Role Play

What are Role Plays?

Role Playing is the learning activity that involves the participants acting in some common character types in daily life or simulation of real life situations. Role playing can also be used as an assessment. Teachers can use role play to assess students' understanding or perspectives on the role of the characters, or their engagement and involvement during the role play. It has been suggested that role playing is particularly effective when applied to second language learning, which provides valuable opportunities for students to practice and develop the new language. Learners acquire new languages efficiently when they receive comprehensible input, engage in genuine communication, have active involvement, and have positive affect, during the role playing.

Structure of Role Play

There are two ways for which role play can be used as an assessment. The first way involves the teacher specifying the characters and context for students to act. The students then express their imagination and creativity through their words and actions in the play. This will assess the students' engagement, involvement and understanding of their roles during the role play. The second way involves the teacher pre-organizing a role play for which students are to answer some pre-set questions.

The role play process can either be completely autonomous (the teacher just watches silently outside the group), or can be 'directed' by the teacher as a 'narrator' in old movies (by stating the flow of the play during its performance outside the group).

Some interesting set-ups for role play learning:

1. Guessing games of famous people – One participant try to role play the characteristics of a famous person, and the other participants ask questions in order to guess the person's identity.
2. Extraterrestrial organisms – Students are told to be extraterrestrials that do not have knowledge about the human civilization. The teacher presents some earthly objects (e.g. toothbrushes, watches) to them, and students have to draw conclusion about the uses as if they had no knowledge of them. This can stimulate students' imagination and creative thinking when trying to describe the objects.
3. Role switching – The teacher describes different characters for students. Students role-play one character, and switch on another character on the teacher's signal.



	Declarative	CHARACTERISTICS
Y	Functioning	
Y	Timely to Set	
Y	Timely to Answer	
	Timely to Correct	
Y	Timely to provide Feedback	
Y	Suitable for Large Class	
	Can substitute with Computers	
	Passive	
Y	Active	
Y	Process Oriented Method	
	Product Oriented Method	

P = Possibly Y =Yes

Advantages of Role Play Assessment

- Sets up a relatively non-threatening setting in which the students can feel comfortable and relaxing with speaking an unfamiliar language, resulting in the development of long-term motivation in mastering the new language.
- Encourages the students to make use of their innovative thinking and creativity when acting the characters out.
- When preparing and rehearsing for the role play, students need to cooperate and communicate with their team members. This can promote effective interpersonal relations and social transactions among the team members, as students need to communicate well and accept their role responsibilities, and relate themselves to others during the simulation.
- Changes the way the students see the world because role play allows them to view things and approach problems with a different perspective.
- Allow students to explore the feelings, attitude, values and culture contained in the characters of role play. Drama-based activities usually create a strong emotional involvement to performers, because in the story they often have to think about big issues in life (e.g. love, hate, death) which are issues that they may not commonly have a chance to experience in their usual life.

Disadvantages of Role Play Assessment

- Teachers have to do heavy preparation for setting up the background, contexts, and learning goals for the role play activities.
- Data and background information about the role played character may need to be prepared and distributed to the students to help them with the assigned roles.
- It may be quite difficult to assess proficiency of the students on their role play performance.

How to design a good Role Play Assessment?

1. An important step in designing a role play simulation is to decide the specific learning objectives for it. For instance, it can be to promote students' effectiveness of communication in using the language for shopping when



travelling to that country. Specific learning objectives can be very useful for both the teachers and students to evaluate and reinforce what the students have learnt during the activity.

2. In the role play process, the teacher should just define the general structure of the flow, and let the students interact among themselves spontaneously. The teacher's role is to maintain students' motivation by stimulating their curiosity and keeping the role play performance relevant to the topic and learning objectives. The emphasis for learning in role play is on its process.
3. Teachers can engage the students in the topic by activating their background knowledge, and set up an interactive display of items such as: photographs, pictures, posters, books etc. so that the students can obtain confidence and perform smoothly.
4. The teacher should always involve all the students as either the performers or the audiences, and tell them to take notice of other students' performance and give feedback. Audiences' reactions can contribute significantly to the feeling and experience of the performers, and shape their performance in real-time.
5. The teacher can also prepare role play cards, which are cards stating the roles that students are responsible of. Randomly select the roles for students using role play cards can prevent them from selecting only the easy and less challenging roles.
6. Recording, self-assessment observations can help in giving feedback to students regarding their performance and usage of their knowledge.

Marking Rubrics

MARKING RUBRICS	Excellent	Proficient	Average	Poor
Fluency:	Perfect fluency of the acting performance, including the pace, speech and behaviors	Generally fluent flow of the performance; existence of a few pauses did not largely disturb the flow	Some occasional pauses occurring during the performance, somewhat affecting its comprehensibility	Frequent, awkward pauses during the course of performance, significantly disturbing the flow
Relatedness:	Most of the performance is well-organized, related to the theme of the topic, and also to the learning objectives of the activity	Satisfactorily relate the performance to the topic and learning objectives; the story is generally a complete one	The link between the performance to the topic and learning objectives is weak and not clear	Chaotic presentation; difficult to understand the performance in relation to the topic and learning objective
Engagement:	Successfully engage the performers, audiences and teacher to concentrate carefully on the performance	Generally able to attract the attention of the performers and audiences on the performance	Uninteresting performance; the audiences barely listen to the performance occasionally	Fail to retain attention of audience; weak connection with other performers
Feedback (as audience):	Carefully watching and giving appropriate, useful feedback for improvement to performers after the performance	Some useful feedback is given for the improvement of the performance	Giving few feedback with regard to the performance	Pays no attention to the performance thus giving no useful feedback



Web References and Resources

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