Role Play - An Effective Approach to Developing Overall Communicative Competence

JOUER LE ROLE D'UNE APPROCHE EFFICACE POUR LE DEVELOPPEMENT GLOBAL DES COMPETENCE COMMUNICATIVE

XU Qing[1,*]

[1]College of Foreign Languages, Qingdao University of Science & Technology, China
*Corresponding author.
Address: 69 Songling Road, Qingdao 266061, China
Email: allyxq@sina.com

Abstract

Increasing cross-cultural contact has highlighted the necessity for enhanced effective cross-cultural communication, and it becomes the most important task for an English teacher to help students develop communicative competence. As a type of communicative activity, role play is a very valuable method to help learners to interact and provide them an opportunity to practice in the target language context. This paper addresses the issue of role play in the college audio-visual class, its purpose is to suggest that the application of role plays could increase students' intercultural awareness and help them develop overall communicative competence.

Key words: Role play; Communicative competence; Cultural awareness

Résumé

L'augmentation de contacts interculturels a souligné la nécessité d'améliorer efficacement la communication interculturelle, et il devient la tâche la plus importante pour un professeur d'anglais pour aider les élèves à développer la compétence communicative. Comme un type d'activité communicative, jeu de rôle est une méthode très utile pour aider les apprenants à interagir et à leur fournir une occasion de pratiquer dans le contexte de la langue cible. Ce document aborde la question de jouer un rôle dans le collège de classe audio-visuelle, son but est de suggérer que l'application de jeux de rôle pourraient sensibiliser les étudiants interculturel et les aider à développer la compétence communicative générale.

Mots-clés: Jouer le rôle, Compétence communicative; Sensibilisation culturelle

INTRODUCTION

This paper will discuss the significance of communicative competence relative to the field of college English education and explore an enjoyable way to increase students' intercultural awareness, sensitivity, and knowledge through collaborative, group-generated role plays. Role-play is the typical social communicative activity within a communicative approach. The rationales of communicative approach direct that composing and manipulating meaningful role-play activities within the framework of English classroom to cultivate students' communicative competence is of vital importance. Within this pedagogical framework and methodology, small teams of students create characters, develop a story, write dialogues, and perform extended role plays based on various intercultural situations. This technique utilizes an active process of communicative pre-writing tasks, multi-draft scripts, rehearsal, self-direction, performance, and peer feedback. This long-term process allows learners to develop expressive intercultural language skills which improve communicative competence and broaden international sensitivity. Take Family Album U.S.A. class performance as an example, the following will focus on extended role plays and how they could provide learners with an opportunity to develop overall communicative competence.

1. DEFINITION AND FEATURES

1.1 Definition and Classification

Role play is defined as the projection in real life situations with social activities. In this activity, students play different roles in a particular language scene to solve the practical problems they may encounter, and use of language, movement, facial expressions and other means to act out what happened in that scene. Meanwhile, the full performance of activities can be an active classroom atmosphere, mobilize the enthusiasm of the students.

The detailed teaching of role play is categorized into three steps: presentation, comprehension, consolidation and utilization. For a long story, a teacher usually postpones the third step to the second teaching class. In the process of presentation, a teacher acts as an conductor to give students a whole idea about the story by various means, such as, multi-media power point. Usually such kinds of vivid ways grasp the students' attention deeply. In the process of comprehension, a teacher checks if the students understand the content of teaching by questions. In the third step, students participate in the communicational dialogue and role play. In this process, the students play as dominant actors organized by the teacher. So students can practice English in the following ways: perform the original dialogues in the texts or revised ones, illustration and presentation, repetition paragraph by paragraph, theatric performance, and revised English songs etc. Role playing activities are not simple fun games but communicatively interactive classroom activity with the learners as the center of learning and with task as the central part.

1.2 Team Work and Collaboration

Team work and collaboration are two of the key elements within an extended role play task. Learners will be able to take part in authentic communication about their group presentation while at the same time improving their ability to speak clearly and effectively with each other. Members of the group will have individual and group responsibilities which will foster an atmosphere of team work and sharing knowledge. Indeed, this type of group activity has a great social benefit in terms of giving students the chance to develop their interpersonal skills while using English.

"At whatever stage, students should be asked to perform tasks collaboratively…one purpose of collaborative learning is to teach students how people in a particular discipline. . . make judgments that are regarded as sound. Another purpose is to illustrate to students how knowledge is generated and arrived at" (Bruffe, 1985).

If a class is mono cultural, as is often the case in many of our classes, having members of the class adopt another cultural and role-play as an individual from another cultural will serve the same purpose quite well. Learners need to discuss their group presentation with their peers from the creation of the topic and situation to the feedback after the performance. Thus, from the beginning until the end of this long-term collaborative task, learners must communicate using the target language.

2. STUDENTS' ROLES

Students begin by imitating the episode plots. Since students have the freedom to choose their own characters, a high level of interest will be maintained. Ernst(1994) noted that choice of topic is critical for stimulating motivation. Preparing for role play gives learners a foundation of basic knowledge and understanding of a particular culture.

Learners discuss and decide who they will become and what type of characters they will portray. Learners should work collaboratively while generating a basic theme and story concept. For better character development, aspects of an individuals' character, personality, and attitude must be discussed and decided early on.

The goals of these activities also include improving communication ability for students. From the re-writing activities, students will begin working on the actual script and story development of the extended role play. Later, learners should rework their scenario, peer-feedback will improve skills during these initial stages of creativity, students would be free to add or remove various dialogue lines. This is a type of active, creative sentence combining exercise which: ". . . improve students' sentence structure, length of sentence, and sentence variety. For ESL students, it does provide plenty of practice with the synthetic structures. . . " (Raimes, 1983)

Role plays may be longer or shorter (five to fifteen minutes) depending on the level, particular goals, and requirements of the class. In either case, students should be encouraged to start thinking about their culturally representative body language, gestures, facial expression, personal space and numerous other aspects of non-verbal communication. In addition, volume, pace, and tone of voice must all be culturally representative based on the particular situation the learners have created. Students should actively practice their role-play as a way to foster fluid creativity and collaborative efforts. Self direction or peer direction will also promote discussion and information exchange. Finally, the finished product, a well polished and well rehearsed role play is presented to the entire class. Naturally, the interaction between the characters, which the audience is able to observe, will allow the entire class to learn about all of the various cultures their classmates have researched and represented. In this way, the class continues to foster a positive collaborative atmosphere.

Students practice their communication skills by using the language actively. In the process of developing communicative competence through role-playing, they develop an awareness of the target culture, the teacher acts

as coach and facilitator, providing reference information and immediate feedback.

3. BENEFICIAL EXPERIENCES

Within a creative, communicative, and collaborative setting, role plays benefit learners in many ways. Students can be exposed to an incredibly wide variety of experiences and potential experiences while improving overall communicative competence. Structures, functions, and the vocabulary necessary for dealing with these situations may be introduced and exercised in a realistic and meaningful way. Role plays provide training for both speaking and listening in any language–learning situation. Role plays are an essential dress rehearsal which enables learners to do more than learn a set of phrases as they will experience how communication and interaction might take place in a variety of situations (Early, 1977).

Role plays enable students to build up more confidence while speaking English. Further, they provide an opportunity for shy students to adopt a different persona. Reticent students occasionally have difficulty participating in conversations about themselves or in voicing their own opinions. The adoption of a character who is from another culture may be a liberating experience. The character is guided by the character's cultural norms and communicative desires, not the learners'. Adopting another's cultural role creates freedom for experimentation while it also creates a significant learning situation for the participants and for the audience. Role plays in front of an audience provide more useful feedback as the other members are able to be informed, outside observers. This is another part of the collaborative framework as active participants (the people role playing) and passive participants (the audience) are able to criticize and give feedback on the performance together. As this feedback will take place during and after the creation of the situations, students will be working together from the onset of this task.

Role plays inherently foster a wide range of participatory, communicative activities which require an incredible array of various communication techniques. Intonation, stress patterns, and tone of voice are all explored. In addition, non-verbal communication methods such as body language and gestures must all be understood and appreciated from an intercultural perspective. Eye contact, hand gestures, and personal space are all inherently explored while participating in a role play. Finally, role-plays may be justified as a fun activity which provides useful language exchange, promote interaction, stimulate creativity, develop fluency, increase intercultural awareness, deepen understanding and increase communicative competence.

Content based role plays give students the unique opportunity to explore another culture in detail from a variety of perspectives. Speakers of English should be able to express themselves properly and understand the grammatical, discourse, strategic, and sociolinguistic factors for any given situation based on a higher level of communicative competence. They also need to be able to use the culturally appropriate language in order to communicate with respect while avoiding any stereotypes. Having knowledge about another culture which extends beyond stereotypes is necessary in order to treat various people as individuals and provide the best feedback while using the most appropriate English in order to deal with any inter-cultural situation.

Deeply understanding the various cultures of the people which learners may come into contact with will allow for better intercultural understanding, better communication, and ultimately better performance. These communicative activities will train students to deal with the unpredictable nature of language and intercultural communication. Whether a student is role-playing or not, learners will experience the situation from both points of view concerning international communication. This inherently improves the ability to be able to deal with unpredictable situations or needs. Knowledge of other cultures is the base behind being able to communicate effectively. Learners taking part in this collaborative task will need a certain degree of creativity and imagination. These tasks are flexible and fluid, living entities in themselves that will grow and develop depending on the initiative, imagination, and intensity of the participants. Students will be able to learn from each other as they share knowledge with their peers. A non-teacher centered, student fronted setting is a necessary approach for successfully allowing students to increase their cultural awareness and sensitivity.

CONCLUSION

Role plays provide learners with the opportunity to examine, understand, and acquire knowledge which will assist and better facilitate intercultural communication. This type of creative, communicative task will provide an opportunity for experimentation with language and experimenting with knowledge about various cultures. Learning from peers through group activities will benefit students implicitly and explicitly. Within this framework, a higher level of communicative competence and a broader understanding of intercultural exchange may be obtained.

REFERENCES

Breen, M. and Mann (2004). *Classroom Decision-Making* (pp. 10-18). Shanghai, China: Shanghai Foreign Language Press.

Brooks, N. (1968). Teaching Culture in the Foreign Language Classroom. *Foreign Language Annals,* (1), 204-217.

38

Brown H. Douglas (2000). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (2nd ed). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Byram, M., & Fleming, M., (Eds.). (1998). *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective: Approaches Through Drama and Ethnography.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and Culture in Language Teaching.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Littlewood, W. (2003). *Communicative Language Teaching: An Introduction.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Livingstone, C. (1983). *Role Play in Language Learning* (pp. 24-51). Harlow, UK: Longman.

Milroy, E. (1982). *Role-Play: A Practical Guide.* Aberdeen, UK: Aberdeen University Press.

Shaw, M.E., Corsini, R.J., Blake, R.R., & Mouton, J.S. (1980). *Role Playing: A Practical Manual for Group Facilitators* (pp. 42-55). San Diego, CA: University Associates, Inc.,

Tomalin, B. & Stempleski, S. (1993). *Cultural Awareness.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.