

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Özgür Ünal-Eriş

Department of Political Science and International Relations

İstanbul 29 Mayıs University

IMPORTANCE OF ROLE PLAYING IN TEACHING

As professors we know that too much teacher-talk is not good for learning. The challenge is in finding space and time in a squeezed curriculum and having the confidence to literally take some risks and try out more meaningful tasks that will stimulate independent learning.

Role playing is a method which I use when I am teaching EU politics. It is a teaching strategy that fits within the social family of models (Joyce and Weil, 2000). These strategies emphasize the social nature of learning, and see cooperative behaviour as stimulating students both socially and intellectually. Getting into the minds of the important characters in history of political science through role playing really brings the period of study alive for students. Role-playing, like any good inquiry approach, transforms the content of education from information into experience.

Role playing is a learning structure that allows students to apply the content of the lecture or the whole course as they are put in the role of a decision maker who must make a decision regarding a policy, problem, resource allocation or some other outcome. This technique is an excellent tool for engaging students and allowing them to interact with their peers as they try to complete the task assigned to them in their specific role. Students are generally more engaged as they try to respond to the material from the perspective of their character.

Role-playing as a teaching strategy offers several advantages for both the professor and the student.

Advantages of role playing:

- It motivates students: The creative aspect of the exercise will make it seem more like play than like work; it is fun and motivating.

- It enhances communication and interpersonal skills; quieter students get the chance to express themselves in a more forthright way.
- It develops confidence and self-efficacy and is useful for improving certain skills such as interviewing and team working.
- The pressure to solve a problem or to resolve a conflict for their character can motivate a student far more than the sort of pressure that they usually face preparing for an exam, and it is far more typical of the pressure that will be on them in real life. The students are more likely to retain knowledge that they have constructed themselves more than that simply handed to them in lecture (Havholm, 1998 ; Duveen and Solomon, 1994).
- The world of the classroom is broadened to include the outside world – thus offering a much wider range of language opportunities.
- It helps students to understand that there are casual relationships between people’s behaviour and the outcomes of events as the consequences of behaviours can be immediately observed.
- It enables students to identify options and solutions and help them manage conflicts. Role-playing exercises show the world as a complex place with complicated problems that can only rarely be solved by a simple answer that the student has previously memorized (Cage, 1997).
- It provides professor immediate feedback about the learner’s understanding and ability to apply concepts.
- It reduces discipline problems which often arise from boredom and lack of motivation. Research has shown that “integrating experiential learning activities in the classroom increases interest in the subject matter and understanding of course content” (Poorman 2002: 32). Fogg (2001) tells of a college professor who felt that his history classes were boring and not involving the students. After trying out a role-playing type game one semester, he observed that students were much more interested in the material.
- It teaches empathy and understanding of different perspectives (Poorman, 2002). Exercises emphasizing the importance of people and their viewpoints are important preparation for students who will go on in many professions, including business, academia, and politics.

- Participation through role playing helps embed concepts. It gives life and immediacy to academic material that can be largely descriptive and/or theoretical. Students see the relevance of the content for handling real world situations and learn that skills they learn separately (such as quantitative and communications skills) are often used together in order to accomplish many real-world tasks (Bair, 2000).
- Students claim to remember their role in these scenarios and the ensuing discussion long after the semester ends; so the outcome of the course is well achieved. .

There are certain challenges as well.

Challenges of role playing:

- One of the biggest challenges of the role playing technique is to get all students to participate and be truly engaged. Professors might want to consider ways of increasing the likelihood of strong student participation. The professor might offer a participation grade as an outcome of their role playing in the discussion. He/she might also consider using some of the role playing tasks in questions on exams and make it clear to students that that is the case. He/she could even tell them that they might have to answer a question from the perspective of any of the roles, not just the one they were assigned. Role play may awaken previously subdued or suppressed emotions.
- It is less effective in large groups; can create a chaos.
- Professor must accept her new role where she/he does not dominate the class anymore.
- It can be embarrassing for some students.
- Can lack focus unless well planned and monitored.
- Can be unpredictable in terms of outcomes.
- Can be time-consuming.

How does it work?

A typical roleplaying activity would have students taking on a role of a character, learning and acting as that individual would do in the typical setting. In role-playing the student is representing and experiencing a character known in everyday life; he/she assumes a particular personality of a different person (Scarcella and Oxford, 1992).

Role playing activities can be divided into four stages:

1. Preparation and explanation of the activity by the professor:

- Present a problem, situation or event that represents some aspect of reality.
- Define the problem, situation and roles clearly.
- Reduce the level of abstraction or complexity so that the students may become directly involved with underlying concepts.

2. Student preparation of the activity:

- Define the problem
- Create a readiness for the role(s)
- Establish the situation , do some research.
- Cast into the characters
- Brief and warm up

3. The role-playing :

- Acting: Students follow the procedure outlined by the professor to act out role-plays.
- Involve the audience
- Analyze the discussion
- Evaluate
- Unless the professor is playing a role, it is helpful to join the discussion from time to time and ask complementary questions as a moderator of the discussion. Some students may feel threatened or self-conscious. Using humour can help dispel embarrassment. Using role-plays that exaggerate weak responses might break the ice.

4. The discussion or debriefing after the role-play activity

Conclusion:

When role-play is used in a school setting, students extend their knowledge of a subject by researching a character within a given course of study. Student interest is raised in subject matter, thus generating interest within the subject .Students become active participants in their education rather than passive observers. It allows students to feel empathy for others when portraying a character involved in crisis times in history. More often, role-playing is used as a strategy in which students use their background knowledge in addition to acquiring new information about the character in order to better play the role (Lloyd, 1998).

Thus beyond the preparation, the lesson tends to run itself, requires minimal input while maximizing learners' involvement. The students love it, particularly the excitement generated from playing a famous character. Role playing enables a creative, student-centred lesson that is committed to nurturing independent learning; the result of the involvement is increased learning. In that sense I believe it is a mainstay of education that needs to be incorporated into our lesson plans on a regular basis.

Notes: During the workshop I will attach a small video showing a role playing exercise done in my class; which will be around 20 minutes maximum. Then I want to do the role playing exercise in my own workshop. Every participant should get into the role of their prime minister , act as if they are in the European Council and discuss the following topics: Turkey-EU relations, refugee crisis and European solutions, relations with Russia and the USA.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Bair, E. Scott (2000), 'Developing Analytical and Communication Skills in a Mock-Trial Course Based on the Famous Woburn, Massachusetts Case', *Journal of Geoscience Education*, 48:4.

Cage, M.C. (1997), 'Role-Playing Replaces Spreadsheets in College Accounting Courses', *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 42:21

Cherif, A., Verma, S. and Summervill, C. (2002), 'From the Los Angeles zoo to the classroom' *The American Biology Teacher* 60:8, pp. 613-617.

Duveen, Jonathan and Solomon, Joan (1994), 'The Great evolution trial: Use of role-play in the classroom' *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*: 31:5.

Fogg, P. (2001) 'A history professor engages students by giving them a role in the action', *Chronicle of Higher Education* 48:12, pp.12-13

Havholm, Peter (1998), 'It's not the technology that worries me' *The Technology Source*. Available at <http://technologysource.org/?view=article&id=174>. Accessed May 1, 2018.

Joyce, B. & Weil, M. (2000), *Models of teaching*. (Boston. Allyn and Bacon).

Lloyd, C. V. (1998), 'Engaging students at the top (without leaving the rest behind)' *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 42:3, pp.184-191.

Poorman, P. B. (2002) 'Biography and role-playing: fostering empathy in abnormal psychology' *Teaching of Psychology*, 29:1, pp.32-36.

Scarcella, R. and Oxford, R. L. (1992) *The tapestry of language learning* (Boston: Heinle and Heinle).