SLSS

**Transition Year
Curriculum Support Service**

*Supporting
Active
Teaching
and
Learning*

Role Play

NDP
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

**Supporting Active Teaching and Learning**
**Role Play**
**Pilot Material for Transition Year**

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# Transition Year Curriculum Support Service
# Supporting active teaching and learning

## Introduction

A key feature of Transition Year should be the use of a wide range of teaching/learning methodologies and situations. The Guidelines for Schools[1] issued by the Department of Education and Science are very clear on this point.

Inspectors' evaluations of the Transition Year Programme reinforce this emphasis on varied teaching and learning. For example:

> *Most schools were providing pupils with as wide a range of stimulating activities and learning experiences as possible. In this regard, activity based learning projects were very much in evidence*[1]

In the document Writing the Transition Year Programme, produced last year by the Support Service and the Inspectorate, a range of examples of approaches are provided:

- negotiated learning
- research
- practical work
- role-play
- project work
- visiting speakers
- computer-based learning
- drama in education exercises

- classroom discussion
- debates
- demonstrations
- interviews
- use of audio tapes
- visualisation
- field trips

- formal input by teacher
- pair work
- group work
- simulations
- use of video tapes
- study visits
- oral presentations

From a teacher's point of view, no matter what the subject or module being taught, a critical question is to decide on the best combination of strategies which will facilitate valid and worthwhile learning experiences for all the students in a Transition Year class. The greater the teacher's repertoire of skills, the more likely is she or he to vary the learning opportunities on offer to students.

This series of guides aims to assist teachers in extending their professional competences. The ideas and suggestions in the following pages have been derived primarily from experiences within Transition Year classes. Ideally they should be explored within an in-career development workshop.

It is the wish of the team working on the support service that this guide will encourage more teachers to use role-play in appropriate situations with their Transition Year students so that students' learning is enriched. We wish you well in that challenge.

1. Department of Education (1996): Transition Year Programme 1994-1995. An Evaluation by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education. Page 20.

# ROLE-PLAY

**Definition**

The use of role-play as an educational technique is part of the wider set of techniques that have collectively become known as *gaming and simulation*. Role-play is a learning device used to explore issues, situations, themes, or texts where diverse opinions need to be exposed and ideas require fleshing out. Through this method, young people have opportunities to express their feelings, explore their ideas of reality and be confronted with the consequences of their actions. They may also be asked to explore more complex social situations and inter-relationships.

**Relationship to Transition Year Guidelines**

- 'A key feature of Transition Year should be the use of a wide range of teaching/learning methodologies'

- Transition Year aims to educate 'for maturity with the emphasis on personal development including social awareness and increased social competence'

- 'The Transition Year should help facilitate personal growth and social development as a central concern of the school through active participation in a programme *where the approach process is as important as the content.*'

**Benefits to students**

R*ole-play ... trains you to pick your spot on the stage of life and stand on it with dignity.*

**Role-play**

- is student-centred

- is *active.* Participants do not merely discuss theoretical problems of behaviour and alternative ways of acting, they observe and practise the new ways of behaving

- adds life and immediacy to academic descriptive material (History, Geography, English, Economics)

- helps facilitate the development of interpersonal and communication skills

- builds confidence

- provides educational opportunities to practise making forays into the unknown in supported non-damaging situations

- facilitates an empathy with and a deeper understanding of the motives of the character/ type of person being played

- takes 'old knowledge' and through classroom experiences adds to this so that the result is 'new knowledge'

- can offer the learner an alternative angle from which to view a piece of text, a social issue, etc.

- enables the student to express hidden feelings

- motivates students for future learning.

**Learning outcomes**

*Through taking part in role-play, students should be able to:*

- listen to the instructions given by the teacher and to others involved in the role-play as it progresses

- communicate more effectively

- demonstrate skills of observation and active listening to other students

- demonstrate skills of negotiation, dealing with customers, chairing meetings, etc.

- analyse, reflect on and evaluate their own interpretation of the role and the interpretation of others

- discuss with a deeper understanding the character/concept/issue under examination

- identify the advantages of the technique as an active learning methodology

- devise appropriate role-play situations for the purpose of working out future issues or exploring other texts, themes, characters, etc.

**Benefits to teacher**

**Role-play**

- gives back to students some responsibility for the direction of learning

- motivates students

- offers teacher opportunities to see other qualities in students

- enables teacher to become a facilitator of learning rather than a disseminator of knowledge

- provides an alternative method of teaching

- helps students retain the understanding which has been developed through active learning

- allows teacher to play a role too!

**General considerations**

Like other teaching tools role-play is one which requires a lot of care and skill. Techniques are needed to ensure that the role-play which takes place is safe and educationally worthwhile. Role-play makes demands on the teacher's sensibilities and receptivity since there must be a constant interplay between student and teacher. Hence creating the right environment is critical.

Most people have a reasonable capacity for interacting with others and reacting to the needs of a situation; with the right training most teachers can run role-plays very successfully. The competence which is required can be broken down into three aspects:

1.  A thorough knowledge of the methodology

2. Sensitivity to individual and group behaviour - the teacher needs to be aware of the potential for bullying, inappropriate personal disclosure, or over-emotional involvement

3. Self-knowledge - if, for example, the teacher is under stress, facilitation of role-play which deals with sensitive issues may not be a good idea. It is essential that the teacher is capable of supporting the students without demanding anything in return.

The single greatest challenge for the teacher in using this approach lies in creating an atmosphere which encourages students to take the exercise seriously and not just view it as 'a game' (affected accents, for example, unless they have a valid place in the role-play should be discouraged). A development from simple role-play occurs when students are able to shake off their own personae and wholeheartedly take on the personality of the character they are playing. By the same token, it is very important that debriefing and de-roling takes place after the activity, to allow students to make a conscious shift from the role to who they really are.

## Uses of Role-Play

The most obvious uses of role-play are in those areas which deal primarily with aspects of communication. Role-play is a highly verbalised procedure. It is therefore very well suited to those subjects which deal with linguistic ability, namely languages, literacy and social skills training. It can also be a very effective methodology for building confidence and communication skills in less articulate young people.

*There are a number of ways in which role-play can be fitted into the curriculum*:
● As an introduction to the subject, e.g. Two neighbours discuss a pollution problem in their housing development; this can lead into environmental studies topic in the Geography classroom

- As a natural follow-up to a point being explored, e.g. In the CSPE classroom where the role of the local politician is being explored the students may be placed in a situation where they 'meet a local politician' and have an opportunity to lobby him/her about an issue which is of relevance to their school.

- As a central feature of the subject course; role-play as a learning methodology is explored in the Drama classroom.

- As a warm-up/break/interlude from more routine forms of learning, e.g. While reading the text of *The Field* the students may be invited to get into role and explore how it might feel to have something you worked hard for all your life, taken away from you.

- As revision. Students might be asked to play interviewer and interviewee in order to revise the different reactions to the 1916 Rising.

- As assessment. Language skills might be put into practice 'in the cinema', 'in the train station', or 'in the hospital'.

## Basic Categories of Role-Play

Role-play can be divided into two main categories:

1. *The practice of skills and techniques*, e.g. students may be asked to practise their public speaking skills in a simulated Town Council Meeting.

2. *Changes in understanding, feelings and attitudes*, e.g. students may be asked to explore how it might feel to belong to a minority group.

The conduct of the lesson must be adapted to the type of role-play used. If the role-play is planned for the practice of skills and techniques, the teacher will have to ensure that the skills needed to speak in public have been

taught/demonstrated. The environment and role instructions will be carefully chosen to simulate as closely as possible the constraints and problems likely to be encountered in a real-life situation. The student is likely to be given certain criteria that are deemed essential elements of public speech (clarity of diction, eye-contact, pace, etc.) and so these would form the basis of the de-briefing afterwards.

The conduct of the second type of role-play, intended to explore feelings and attitudes, is quite different. The initial introduction will be more concerned with describing the problem than offering a solution. The framework for the role-play itself will be less tightly constrained so as to allow the students more scope to involve themselves and use their own personalities and experience. During the running of the role-play different methods such as shadowing, 'alter ego' and group consultancy can be used to draw out special aspects. The role-play may become emotional as students are drawn into exploring their own and others' feelings. After the role-play has finished the teacher will spend some time probing the reasons for certain responses and will conduct a carefully structured debriefing to ensure that all students are brought back to reality and have no remaining worries about the exercise.

There are different ways to classify role-play (see Shaw 1980 and Wohlking 1980). One useful way is to subdivide the two categories above into five functions which a role-play can fulfil:
1. Describe
2. Demonstrate
3. Practise
4. Reflect
5. Sensitise

## 1. Describe

Here, role-play is used to describe a situation by means of dramatisation rather than by pure verbal description. Two teenagers may want to show their peers how they see the problem of parental control in a typical situation. This category is very close to that of drama. Indeed it overlaps

with improvised 'street theatre' or 'educational drama'. The difference lies in the *purpose* of role-play in the classroom compared to that of drama.

Teachers using Drama in education … 'must understand about the differences in the experience of, on the one hand, dramatising for others and on the other, making drama serve the needs of those who create it whilst they are creating it'. (Dorothy Heathcote)

In the classroom, entertainment of an audience is not important and the intent is to start a discussion and/or other educational activities. The students will need to have an understanding of the situation and the briefing, if any, will concentrate on the *facts* of the situation (e.g. in the example of the exploration of parental control, issues such as the legal age for drinking, and other legal responsibilities of parents, might be discussed).
The first stages of debriefing will be restricted to correcting any factual errors before going into a discussion or other follow-up activity using the subject presented.

## 2. Demonstrate

This is similar to the previous category but the intention here is to give the student a demonstration to be copied, i.e. a role model. Here again the emotional involvement is minimal. The emphasis is on the technique or skill being demonstrated. Likewise, the debriefing should not be problematic in that the students should be capable of discriminating between the critical actions of the model, e.g. laboratory experiments, the skill of rebuttal in debating, or telephoning for a work experience placement.

## 3. Practise

The previous two types of role-play tend not to be found in their pure form but as part of other types of role-play. This third kind is much more common. Typical situations might include students trying out their language skills in a practical situation, dealing with aggression in the playground, practising interview or other social skills. Preparation for this type of role-play should be detailed. The student should be clear about the task to be performed. There must be a list of *dos* and *don'ts*, some guidance on how to carry out the task. This will also provide the framework for follow-up discussion and evaluation at the end.

It is very likely that the student will need a second person to act in role with him/her as the bully/customer/interviewer, etc. The student will benefit through the observation of peers or the use of videotape, but of course an element of emotional risk-taking is part of such an exercise. Also it is possible that the person 'playing' opposite may 'suffer' to some extent. This depends on the degree of realism with which the role-play is staged.

The level of emotion engendered by the role-play can be controlled to a great extent by the teacher. For example, answering questions of a member of the Garda Síochána at a routine road block is not in itself an emotional experience but if the person playing the part of the garda is told that he dislikes the protagonist's race then a certain amount of emotion will be generated. Conversely, breaking the news of a death will normally be a traumatic experience but by taking the learner through a series of graded exercises and then giving him/her a detailed method of approach, the event might become less traumatic.

The student should be given the opportunity to 'have another go' after having heard the constructive criticisms of teacher and observers.

## 4. Reflect

In this situation the purpose of the role-play is to encourage the students to concentrate on motivation and reasons for actions. The emphasis is on observation and reflection. The class might be designed, for example, to explore the whole issue of behaviour in groups and to encourage students to look at 'the gang mentality'. So if a scenario is described and students are asked to role-play the situation as it develops, they will engage in *thinking* as well as *action*. There will be a continual analysis of what is going on and its *effects on others*. In this case the feedback is continuous and the teacher's function is to ensure that the students are able to look at themselves as they perform the task.

This activity works well where characters from a text are to be explored. The teacher might place the characters at a party and ask them to interact in-role. The emphasis would be on *why* character X says what she does to character Y, or

*what motivates* character A to treat character B in this way, etc. This exercise encourages students to gain a deeper insight into the motivations of the characters they have been reading about.

## 5. Sensitise

This is probably the most risky type of role-play in that it involves a greater element of emotion. The teacher in this case plays the role of *facilitator* rather than teacher, creating an environment which allows emotions to be brought to the surface and then analysed afterwards. This enables students to recollect the emotion, sensitise themselves to its appearance, and remember it on future occasions.

The scenario for this type of session varies from the relatively unthreatening role-play undertaken to sensitise oneself to the feelings of another person, to the highly charged and potentially threatening activities used in therapeutic groups. The dividing line is a thin one. The teacher who instructs students to expand and examine their emotions must be aware of straying into potentially dangerous territory. Disclosure in front of a whole class can be a threatening experience for young people and so this area must be treated very sensitively.

The key factor here is the extent to which the pre-play instructions and post-play discussion dwell on the actual personality and being of the student. If the purpose of the role-play is clearly to become aware of the problems and points of view of others, whether by trying to take on their characteristics or by putting oneself (as oneself) in their environment, then any emotional feelings can be 'distanced' by the fact that we are discussing the emotions created within the role of the character.

If, on the other hand, the emphasis is on the real idiosyncratic personality of the student, and the emotional consequences of this in the role-play situation, then one is dealing with a therapeutic situation in which the intent is to change some aspect of the personality of the student.

The implications are obvious. If the teacher wants to keep the role-play restricted to a normal educational milieu then he/she must limit the amount of probing which is allowed in the post-play discussion.

For example, if the role play is about a student being unjustly accused of wrong-doing by a teacher the post-play discussion might go like this:

>  *Teacher*: How did you feel when you entered his office to face the accusation?

>  *Student*: I felt frightened.

>  *Teacher*: Why did you feel frightened?

>  *Student*: Because the expression on his face said he already had decided I was guilty and he is so much bigger than me when he's standing up.

>  Up until this point the discussion has not been threatening because the focus is on the *student in role.*

>  *Teacher*: Have you ever felt like that in real life?

Now we are getting on more sensitive ground.

>  *Student*: Yes.

At this point the teacher has a choice of probing into the student's personal life and emotional problems, or using the experience as a base from which to draw general lessons and follow-up points. Either:

>  *Teacher*: Tell us more about the times when you had these feelings of fear when faced by authority. What is it that makes you feel that way?

or.....

>  *Teacher*: Why do you think that people have feelings of fear when faced by authority?

For the teacher, the question to keep in mind is, 'What is the purpose of the role-play? Am I trying to explore the hidden psyche of the student or the problem situation that we are studying?' The questions will then automatically tune themselves to probe either the person or the role character and situation.

## Key Stages in Role-Play

1. Create a safe environment

2. Negotiate ground rules

3. Lead into role-play

4. Design the role-play

5. Define the roles

6. Write the role descriptions

7. Run the role-play

8. Use teacher in-role

9. Debrief

10. Assess and evaluate

## 1. Create a Safe Environment

It is vital that a 'safe' environment is created in the classroom, i.e. one in which the student can feel free to express himself/herself through role-play without the risk of being laughed at or judged. Role-play exposes attitudes and feelings in a way which is *positive*, because they are acknowledged as a legitimate area for discussion and analysis, and also in a way which is *safe* because the student's own behaviour is not at issue - it is the student-in-role which is being discussed.

However narrow a margin there is between the two, it is always within the power of the teacher, by the way he/she conducts the session, to ensure that the student is protected against appearing foolish, or being judged for his/her attitudes. Thus in the debriefing afterwards questions might be phrased like this: 'Why did *the garda* (*or you as the garda*) interrogate the black youth more than he/she did the white?' rather than 'Why did *you* interrogate the ...'

## 2. Negotiate Ground Rules

It is important to have rules in the role-play classroom. No one should feel judged personally for his/her actions. Equally, listening and paying attention is not just courteous behaviour but essential if learning is to take place. In effect each player provides the social environment of the other players. There is a real opportunity here for negotiation between teacher and students as rules are devised together, rules which everyone is expected to adhere to.

## 3. Lead into Role-Play

Preparing for role-play will depend on

● whether or not students have already engaged in the activity

● whether the session comes at the beginning of a course, the middle, or the end, as a way of bringing together what has been learned in other classes

● the confidence and competence of the teacher in using the technique

● how successfully the teacher manages to get the students to take the idea of role-play seriously.

*The graduated lead-in*
The key to this approach is not to force the role-play on the students, but to let it arise naturally out of discussion of the subject matter in hand. The teacher might say, 'O.K. that's what you think they might say to each other in this situation. Let's try that out. You can be X and someone else will play the part of Y. You're sitting outside the courtroom, reading the paper and ...' and before they know it the students are caught up in the role-play. Note that giving them an imaginary activity such as reading the paper, having breakfast, checking out groceries in a store helps to fill the initial silences and gives the players something to engage in.

Another variation on this is to set the scene, give each pair or groups of players their first sentence and ask them to continue from there. For example:

*Teacher*: (*To two students*) You are playing the parts of customer and shop assistant. You (the customer) have been waiting to be served for fifteen minutes. A long queue has formed and just as it is your turn to be served the assistant serves someone else. Your first line is: 'Excuse me, I was next' and yours (to assistant) is 'Ohhh! ... who got out of bed on the wrong side this morning?' Continue from here.

Other stimuli which can be used to 'trigger' role-play situations include the following:

- Photographs - e.g. of a child in Bosnia holding a machine gun ... imagine you are the person in this photograph

- Anecdotes - e.g. teacher tells a story of an incident from childhood which he/she remembers differently to his/her siblings. Students are invited in small groups to share similar experiences and then choose one incident from each group which will be played out to illustrate the different perspectives.

- Teacher 'in role' - e.g. as an Alien who has just arrived on planet Earth and would like to know more about the human species

- Case studies - e g. looking at the case study of an unsuccessful venture in Business Studies and then inviting members of the class to become board of directors, managers, workers and investors; they come together at a meeting to discuss what went wrong

- Story - e.g. set at the time of the Second World War; ask students to play parts

- Games - *The Gamester's Handbook* by Donna Brandes and Howard Philips is an excellent text for teachers, with lots of useful games.

*Warm-up games*
Sometimes students know too little about the subject to use
the graduated lead-in. Sometimes too, a relaxed atmosphere
must be created in order for the role-play to be effective.
On other occasions students need help to move into a
particular frame of mind, increase their observation skills,
build trust with other class members. If chosen carefully,
games can achieve these objectives.

*Walkabout*
This is a physical warm-up exercise. It helps students to
concentrate and focuses them on the signal that should be
responded to immediately. Students are asked to find a space
in the room. At the clap of the teacher's hands they must
walk in any and all directions, always filling the floor space -
no gaps allowed and no bumping into anyone. On
subsequent claps of the hands they are to freeze immediately
and then either: change direction; silently greet everyone
they meet; adopt a business person's walk, the walk of an
harassed parent leaving a child to school, etc.

*Stand and Stare*
An excellent ice-breaker; forces students to make eye-
contact and to concentrate. It sounds easy but many find it
difficult to co-ordinate standing, staring, and moving in the
right order! Students are asked to form a circle. Person A
stares at person B until B says A's name. A moves over to
take up position in B's place. B repeats the exercise by
staring at any other person C until C says B's name. B will
move on, hearing his/her name, and so the game goes on.

*Multi-Purpose*
This is a challenging ice-breaker which develops confidence
in the students to do something in front of their peers and
demands the use of imagination. Students are asked to
arrange themselves in a circle. An object such as a floor
brush, a bin, a window pole, is taken by the teacher into the
middle of the circle and without the use of words the
teacher illustrates a use for this (a clothes line for example).

When someone guesses correctly another person from the circle must come into the middle and illustrate another use (a fishing rod) and so on until everyone has had a go. It becomes more difficult as you move around the circle but students should be encouraged to be as imaginative and creative as possible.

## 4. Design the Role-Play

There are various stages involved in planning a role-play.

- Decide on the function of the role-play. Is it to: introduce a topic? illustrate a point? explore an issue? allow opportunities to demonstrate skill acquisition? or summarise what has been learned? From this, Aims and Objectives may be drawn up.

- Determine the experience and background of the students. Are they accustomed to this learning methodology? Are they likely to be extremely self-conscious? What are their expectations of role-play likely to be?

- Identify 'the scenario' at least in a general way.

- Choose a setting for the role-play: an office; a family meal table; a French Tourist Board office.

## 5. Define the Roles

There are different ways of examining types of role-play. One which is described by Van Ments (1994) is that of defining roles. A role can be defined in a number of ways:

● *Function, authority, power*
Roles are given to people in such a way as to suggest their position within the structure of the role-play (chairperson, parent, headmaster) or in more subtle ways (female, foreign national, traveller); these have an implicit position in the structure of some societies.

● *Objectives, motives, targets*
In this case roles are defined in terms of the objectives which have been set for the role players. Thus, 'Your role is to persuade the committee to permit ...' or 'Success depends on the extent to which you can ...'

● *Background, context*
Sometimes it is sufficient to give a general backdrop for the role-play. Thus, 'You are at a football match, a party, a parent/teacher meeting ...' The conventions and assumptions made in these circumstances can provide material for the role-play without a lot more detail.

● *Skills or abilities*
The part played by each role-player may be defined in terms of their particular knowledge, ability or skill. Thus 'You are an expert on baby noises ...' 'You will be able to tell the architects how to ...' 'You understand the culture of the ...' It is essential to assist the player with the necessary documentation. Alternatively, the abilities of players may be indicated by descriptions of their age, background or experience and it is then up to the students to give information from their imagination or experience.

● *Personality traits*
This method has been around for a long time. It involves the teacher giving quite a detailed description of the character's likes/dislikes/quirks/beliefs. This method can offer literary freedom to the author but imposes certain restrictions on the role-player.

## 6. Write the Role Descriptions

It is a good idea to write the role descriptions for key roles, support roles and spare roles. This helps the teacher to remain focused on the objective/s and it is helpful in highlighting possible obstacles and/or opportunities that are likely to arise during the actual role-play.

It is important that everyone has a role to play. Sometimes students may take the role of observers who are given set questions to answer at the end, or are directed as to the type of feedback the teacher would like. On occasions the observers might be asked to record the behaviour of those in role so they are asked to concentrate on content and process, rather than on personalities (See Appendix 1 for questions for observers and for a table of descriptions of behavioural categories.)

As the roles are being designed a number of considerations should be kept in mind:

- Knowledge. How much knowledge will the characters have? From where will they get it? e.g. teacher might provide authentic documentation from a period in history/ plans of a locally proposed road/ newspaper articles/ a TV documentary. Alternatively the students may be required to invent their own knowledge.

- Skills. What skills will you write into the role for the characters? (You are an expert in ... or you have spent three years in Romania as a medical consultant ...)

- Motivation and beliefs. Rather than saying to the student, 'You don't believe Spanish students should be allowed to spend their summers in Dublin,' the teacher might say, 'Every time you go shopping in Dublin there seems to be greater numbers of Spanish students congregating in Grafton Street. You have heard that they attend summer school here but it seems to you as if they never have class ...'

- Constraints and pressures. Constraints may include everything from prejudices to age, sex, health, intelligence and likewise restraints may be physical, organisational or social.

- Who should the characters meet? In what circumstances? With what purpose?

- How much autonomy will the characters be allowed?

- How will the roles be allocated - randomly? by type casting? deliberately choosing players with characteristics opposite to those of the role? or by allowing students to choose?

## 7. Run the Role-Play

The teacher's role is to:
- provide information
- facilitate
- control time
- engender enthusiasm
- correct problems
- monitor noise levels for the world outside the role-play!
- intervene if necessary.

*Role-rotation*
As its name suggests this approach allows various or all students to take turns in playing the role of the main characters. The advantage is that students are encouraged to use their imagination in order to look at one situation from different angles or demonstrate different approaches to a problem. If each person critiques someone else's role-playing, the cynical 'I could have done that better' can be avoided. There obviously is the danger of highlighting the fact that one person is clearly the weakest at handling the problem so the teacher should be prepared for this.

*Role-reversal*
This is where the characters playing opposite each other have the opportunity to exchange roles. Alternatively the students may be asked to take roles outside of their normal range of experience, e.g. the situation of a white person playing a black person or a sighted person playing a blind person. In this situation there is the potential danger of teasing or inappropriate, affected behaviour and accents. It is important for the role-players to remember that they must

really try to get into the role and act as they would do in the situation, given the constraints of that situation.

*Alter ego*
Sometimes it is instructive to create an opportunity for people to hear what players are really feeling; what their motivations are or what their intentions may be. If a character is played by two people then the public and private personae are simultaneously revealed. This technique is one that requires skill to be most effective in that the alter ego should complement the public persona and should avoid undermining the confidence of the player who is being shadowed. Usually the alter ego stands behind the player and speaks in the first person (e.g. 'I really don't understand why you are talking to me like this ... You sound so angry and I can't work out why ...')

*Supporter*
On occasions, speech can dry up when ideas run out! The players may find themselves with nothing left to say in the role-play even though there are still avenues to be explored and other possible directions to move in. This is where a supporter, from the ranks of the 'audience', may come forward and, like the alter ego, stand behind a player and speak for him/her. Having made his/her contribution the student returns to his/her place in the audience and the original players continue, now perhaps in a different vein. The advantage of this is that it breathes new life into a role-play where the enthusiasm appears to be flagging.

*Consultant group*
This is an effective technique to encourage group decision-making and collaborative learning. Special support groups can be set up to act as consultants to the main players. Before the role-play begins the groups meet with the players, discuss the role-play and how it should proceed. During the role-play either natural opportunities will arise for further consultation or they can be designed as part of the process to ensure that they take place. This technique would be a suitable one for use in the role-play exercises associated with 'Plan Newtown' (see References).

## Trouble-shooting: Problems and Solutions

| Problem | Suggested Solution |
| --- | --- |
| Student departs from role | Stop & discuss / Rotate roles to relieve anxiety |
| Burlesquing (student appears to go 'over the top') | More work needed to create atmosphere of 'work' / Stop the action & discuss |
| Role Play begins to wane | Use role-rotation or the 'supporter' approach / Teacher enters the role-play |
| Lack of understanding or insight | Use role-reversal to increase sensitivity between players |
| Boredom or repetition | Change the format or direction of the role-play / Stop the role-play |
| Emotional escalation (not always a problem) | Monitor closely – if necessary defuse, re-brief players or stop the role-play |

## 8. Use Teacher In-Role

The teacher can have a number of roles in role-play:

- Shadow role: the use of teacher in-role where teacher slides in and out of role until the class is comfortable enough with the drama to participate

- Absentee role: teacher in role as absentee who has to be updated on a 'situation' when he/she arrives or joins the group late for any reason

- Information giver

- Information seeker

- Devil's advocate

- Narrative role

- Confrontational role.

## 9. Debrief

This is a very important part of the role-play process. It is here that the group, guided by the teacher, decides whether or not the original objectives were met. The students also discuss what they learned from the exercise. However, the debriefing session also has the potential to perform many other functions and so it is necessary for the teacher to leave adequate time for a full and worthwhile debriefing rather than look upon it as a short informal chat about 'how the role-play went'.

*The purpose of debriefing*

1. Bring players out of role.

2. Clarify what happened (on factual level).

3. Correct misunderstandings and mistakes.

4. Dissipate tension/anxiety.

5. Bring out assumptions, feelings and changes that occurred.

6. Give players opportunity to engage in self and/or peer observation.

7. Develop observational skills.

8. Relate outcome to original aims.

9. Analyse why things happened that way.

10. Draw conclusions about behaviour.

11. Reinforce or correct learning.

12. Deduce ways of improving behaviour.

13. Apply to other situations.

14. Link with previous learning.

15. Relate to future learning - what next? (a piece of writing, a follow-up enactment, a school campaign organised by the students, a research activity, a visiting speaker to address issues raised ...) (Adapted from The Effective Use of Role-Play, 1994)

The debriefing session is most effective when carried out immediately or soon after the role-play when the recall of events, feelings and attitudes will be fresh. It is not possible to be rigid about how much time to spend on debriefing because sometimes the most surprising issues may emerge that will take quite a lot of time to work through. However, as a guideline, the debriefing session should not be inordinately long relative to the time spent on the actual role-play (e.g. one-and-a-half hours of debriefing for a half-hour role-play is adequate).

When the students are discussing what went on during the role-play they need to be as objective as possible and 'distance' themselves from the characters they were playing. This is not possible unless they have very deliberately come out of role and 'become the student' again.

*Tips for debriefing*
1. Allow sufficient time.

2. Ensure a deliberate and absolute de-roling has taken place.

3. Do not allow judgmental statements of real personalities (as opposed to those of characters) or of attitudes.

4. Try to clear up all misunderstandings.

5. Use open-ended questions. How? Why? What? as well as closed.

6. Emphasise what was done rather than what could have been done.

7. Probe answers. Why not? What if?

8. Explore other possibilities - are there any?

9. Give views of outside experts.

10. Link to future learning.

11. Ensure that each role-player has had an opportunity to speak.

**10. Assess**    Role-play is an exercise which might seem very difficult to assess but if the students don't see that their participation is going to be valued in a tangible way, they may quickly decide it does not have any real worth, given the emphasis on grades and marks in our Education system.

Different types of role-play require different methods of assessment. Role-play that is designed to teach a skill will have as some of the assessment criteria key characteristics of that skill, whereas in another type of role-play the capacity to respond sensitively to others might be a key criterion.

The following is a list of possible criteria that in various combinations might be used to assess students who have been engaged in role-play.

● Willingness to work towards agreed aims

● Ability to seriously engage with the issues

● Degree of participation

● Capacity to interpret the role

● Effort not to depart from role

● Capacity to act in 'support' role

● Sensitivity to others

● Creativity

● Ability to improvise

● Demonstration of skills learned

● Degree of improvement since previous session.

## 11. Evaluate

As with any learning activity, the use of role-play in the classroom should be evaluated. This is somewhat different to the debriefing, which is in effect analysing and discussing what went on during the *process.* The evaluation concentrates on how effective the role-play was as a *method of learning and teaching.* It is as important for the teacher to learn from the evaluation as it is for the students. If well planned, the debriefing might incorporate some evaluation of the role-play in this way. Alternatively, as a separate activity, the teacher might devise a questionnaire for students, asking questions such as the following:

- Did you enjoy this exercise? Why? Why not? (or use a rating scale)

- What role did you play?

- What difficulties did you encounter in playing that role?

- How did you overcome those difficulties?

- How would you assess yourself in terms of participation? (perhaps use a rating scale)

- What skills did you develop as a result of this exercise?

- Where do you think you might use the lessons learned/ skills developed?

- Is there anything you would do differently if you were to rerun the role-play? Why?

# Resources

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