

Using role play

Introduction

Role play is a technique used in the experiential learning approach. It provides an opportunity for learners to develop and practise skills in a simulated setting, before using the skills in real-life situations. It can also expose learners to feelings and emotions that may occur in situations and encourage them to consider the implications of how they act. It provides a 'safe' environment in which to learn about these feelings and emotions.

Many teachers avoid role play because they fear that learners will not take it seriously or will find it threatening. The activities below help teachers explore their feelings about role play before embarking on role-play activities with their learners.

Learning objectives/outcomes

Participants should be able to:

- describe their thoughts and feelings surrounding role play
- explain why role play can be an effective technique
- practise being involved in role play.

Resources required

- Sticky tape for warm-up activity (if required)
- Flip chart paper and pens
- Pre-prepared role play cards using topical issues or examples from relevant vocational settings
- **Sheet 1: Role-play scenarios.** You might want to cut these role-play scenarios into cards
- Copies of **Sheet 2: Continuing professional development (CPD) activity – record and reflections**
- Copies of **Sheet 3: Supported experiment pro forma**

Overall indicative timing: 1.5 hours.

Starting points

This session can build on **Planning for challenges: trying something new**, which explores taking risks and using the cross-curricular activities. Alternatively, it can be used as a standalone session. It is best delivered as a facilitated group CPD activity, although some elements may be useful as a self-study activity.

Suggested approach

Stage 1: Role play – love it or hate it?

(Indicative timing: 15 minutes)

As a warm-up activity ask participants to consider their thoughts on role play. In particular you want participants to focus on their thoughts about using it as part of their teaching.

Using differing points of the room as a reference, ask participants to imagine a line that forms a continuum about role play, with one end of the line being 'I love role play', the other end being 'I hate role play', and the middle being 'I don't have strong feelings about role play' or 'I haven't used role play in my teaching'.

Alternatively, you can use sticky tape to mark a line on the floor.

Ask participants to stand up and move to a point on the continuum line that reflects their feelings about role play. Once they have placed themselves on the line they can share their experiences of role play with one person next to them.

When the line is formed and initial discussion has taken place, divide the line into three groups.

- Group 1: love using role play in their teaching.
- Group 2: hate using role play in their teaching.
- Group 3: don't have strong feelings about role play or haven't used role play in their teaching.

Give each group a piece of flip chart paper.

- Ask group 1 to take two minutes to list all the things they love about using role play with learners.
- Ask group 2 to take two minutes to list all the things they hate about using role play.
- Ask group 3 to give examples of good or bad role play they have seen.

Once the groups have completed their flip charts ask each group to share their responses.

Conclude this part of the session by acknowledging the contributions from each group and summarising that role play has both benefits and challenges to consider when planning learning. These will be explored in the following activities.

Stage 2: Why use role play?

(Indicative timing: 15 minutes)

Ask participants to form new groups of about four or five, creating a mix of those who either love, hate, or have no strong feelings about role play.

Explain that role play can be an effective way to develop learners' skills and experience situations in a 'safe' learning environment.

Ask participants to produce a list of skills they think might be developed through role play. You might want to prompt participants to be specific about such skills rather than using broad, generic terms like 'communication skills'.

Possible responses might include:

- listening skills
- asking appropriate questions
- reading body language
- making appropriate judgements
- providing verbal responses
- keeping calm
- using appropriate language
- working collaboratively
- giving and receiving feedback
- prompting, encouraging and building others' confidence.

When groups have completed their lists ask them to share their responses and post their lists around the room for reference during the next stage of the activity.

Initiate a brief discussion to ascertain how these skills might be useful to learners in other areas of their lives.

Now ask participants to consider what else role play might help learners to learn. The purpose of this part of the activity is to highlight the affective learning that takes place through role play. Affective learning relates to our feelings, values, beliefs and attitudes.

Responses might include those listed below.

- Helps learners see how others feel (puts them 'in their shoes').
- Makes learners think about how they might feel in a particular situation.
- Allows learners to see how different people react in different situations – perhaps in ways they wouldn't expect.

Write these responses up on the whiteboard or on another flip chart, as you will use them for reference in Stage 3.

Conclude this discussion by summarising that role play can be effective in:

- providing appropriate skill development opportunities
- providing deeper understanding by exposing learners to learning in the affective domain.

Stage 3: Have a go

(Indicative timing: 30 minutes)

Ask participants to form new groups of three and suggest they group themselves with someone from a different part of the role play continuum.

Explain that the next activity will include simple role plays so participants can experience it first hand. Explain that you are aiming to demonstrate how effectively role play can provide the learning opportunities described above.

Introduce the idea of 'triad', or groups working in threes, where two people carry out a role play and a third is the observer who provides feedback. Emphasise that the role of observer is important and requires good observation skills in order to support the other partners and give them useful feedback.

You may need to manage this part of the session carefully, allocating the role of observer to the person who was in the 'hate role play' group so they feel safer in the first round. Explain that participants will have an opportunity to take part in each role.

Give out copies of role play cards prepared from **Sheet 1: Role-play scenarios**, or prepare your own role play cards. Remind participants that the performance is not the important part of the activity and that we are focusing on how the technique can be used to deepen learning. Refer to the flip charts or whiteboard to highlight the potential learning opportunities discussed in Stage 2.

Ask participants to allow 10 minutes for the role play including the debrief.

Explain to participants that the debrief should include:

- the participant in role one describing how it felt for them to be in their role
- the participant in role two identifying something they found useful
- the participant in role three giving more detailed feedback on their observation.

When each triad has had the opportunity to discuss their experience ask the whole group to come together to reflect on the role play technique.

Stage 4: Debrief

(Indicative timing: 15 minutes)

Invite participants to give feedback on the role play experience. Explain that you are not looking for feedback on the role play itself (as this would have happened in the role play debrief) but you are now looking to get feedback on role play as a technique, which is part of the experiential learning approach.

You could also ask the following.

- As a participant in the role play, which skills could be developed?
- As a participant, how could role play allow you to experience the feelings and thoughts that might occur in the situation?
- What considerations do you need to take into account when planning role play?
- How do you feel about role play now? Have your views changed at all from the start of the session or are they the same?

Stage 5: Reflection – what is modelled in this session?

(Indicative timing: 15 minutes)

Now invite participants to reflect on the approach you have used to facilitate this session.

- What pedagogy approaches have been modelled in this session?
- What are some of the challenges of using these approaches?
- What have they learned from their experience?
- What other techniques might they use with their learners to demonstrate the approach?

Ideas for extension tasks or for adapting and developing the activity

This activity could be extended to include follow on sessions where participants could:

- identify the features of effective role play scenarios
- create their own bank of role play scenarios to share with each other.

Personal and group action points

Participants may want to continue their learning by practising role play together. For example, colleagues may plan to work together in a team teaching situation to introduce role play into a session. **Sheet 2: Continuing professional development (CPD) activity – record and reflections** can support participants as they record their CPD experience and develop their ideas further. This can be further extended by using **Sheet 3: The supported experiment pro forma**.

New overarching professional standards for teachers, tutors and trainers in the lifelong learning sector

You may need to give guidance to participants on how this CPD activity could be used to support development of their skills within the framework of the new overarching professional standards.

The new professional standards can be downloaded from the Lifelong Learning UK website: www.lifelonglearninguk.org/standards/new_prof_standards.html

The Institute for Learning website, www.ifl.ac.uk, can provide:

- a description of the CPD process
- a place for teachers to keep a record of their CPD activities and achievements.

The joint Training and Development Agency for Schools/Lifelong Learning UK website, which supports the workforce in delivering Diplomas, can provide an online, interactive training needs analysis for teachers of Diplomas: www.teach14-19.org

New overarching professional standards for teachers, tutors and trainers in the lifelong learning sector

Participation in this activity, followed by implementation of new ideas, evaluation of and reflection on the impact of the change in teachers' practice could contribute to a demonstration of the following.

BS2 Applying and developing own professional skills to enable learners to achieve their goals

This activity:

- helps participants explore their thoughts and feelings surrounding role play
- helps participants identify why role play can be an effective technique
- provides practice by being involved in role play.

CPD Sheet 1: Role play scenarios

Role play scenario 1: At the store

Role 1

You work at a local fashion store. A customer approaches you requesting a refund for a shirt that is not suitable. They have a carrier bag from your store but no receipt. The company's returns policy is that the customer must have a receipt for a refund, but an exchange will be allowed without a receipt. The objective is to:

- ensure that the company's returns policy is clearly communicated to the customer
- check that the customer understands the policy
- ensure the customer leaves the store satisfied with the service they have received

Role 2

You are a customer who is returning a shirt to a fashion store in town for a refund. You bought the shirt some time ago, have lost the receipt and are not sure whether or not you are entitled to an exchange or refund. You approach a member of staff with the hope of establishing your rights as a customer.

Role 3

You observe the role play and look for examples of good customer care. You should look for the following.

- The customer being met and dealt with in a courteous manner.
- The customer being given clear advice regarding the store's returns policy.
- The assistant communicating clearly and politely.
- The assistant being assertive in their approach to the situation.

Role play scenario 2: At the factory

Role 1

You work in a factory and your supervisor asks you to override the safety guard in order to speed up production. He states that “it’ll be quicker without the safety guard” and that “the monthly productivity bonus is at risk”. You know this will jeopardise your and others’ health and safety.

Your objective is to:

- explain the risk and implications of overriding the safety guard
- remind the supervisor of your health, safety and well-being responsibilities
- be assertive in refusing to follow bad instructions.

Role 2

You are a supervisor in a production factory. Production is too slow and the monthly productivity bonus is at risk. You know that if the safety guards are taken off, the machines will run faster and production targets will be met. You need to ask one of the machine operators to do this.

Role 3

You observe the role play and pick out examples of good practice shown by the machine operator. You should be looking for the following things.

- The machine operator explaining the potential consequences of overriding the safety guard.
- The machine operator giving their reasons as to why they can’t override the safety guard.
- The machine operator being assertive, despite their supervisor’s request.

Role play scenario 3: At the bus station

Role 1

Someone stops you at the bus station and asks you for directions to the college/hospital/library. The person appears in a hurry and is pre-occupied. The objective is to:

- give clear directions
- use language that is understood
- check that the person has understood and feels confident they can find the college/hospital/library.

Role 2

You are at the bus station. You need to get to the college/hospital/library for an interview and are running late. You are unfamiliar with the area and have discovered that you have left the directions along with your interview preparation notes at home. You are feeling anxious about being late and poorly prepared for the interview.

Role 3

You observe the role play and pick out examples of effective practice shown by the person giving directions. You should be looking for the following things.

- Simple language.
- Clear, easy to follow directions.
- The person listening has understood and feels confident they can find the college/hospital/library.

CPD Sheet 2: Continuing professional development (CPD) activity – record and reflections

Your name:

Date:

Title of activity: **Using role play**

Learning objectives/outcomes of the activity:

You will be able to:

- describe your thoughts and feelings surrounding role play
- explain why role play can be an effective technique
- practise being involved in role play.

New overarching professional standards for teachers, tutors and trainers in the lifelong learning sector: Professional value(s) and Domain(s) addressed

BS2 Applying and developing own professional skills to enable learners to achieve their goals.

What I learned from this activity

How I will use it to develop my professional practice

How I will disseminate/share what I have learned

Further, related CPD that I would find useful:

Indicative time (including reflection time): 1.5 hours

CPD Sheet 3: Supported experiment pro forma

Planning

- What will you try out?

- Which group of learners will you try it out with?

- What support do you need and who from?

- How will you evaluate your 'experiment' (for example, feedback from learners, self-assessment, peer review and evaluation)?

Feedback and evaluation (based on evidence from Stage 4)

- How did it go?

- What have you learned?

Next steps

- What will you do next?