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# TEACHING VOCABULARY THROUGH “ROLE PLAY”

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Vocabulary plays an essential role in expressing ideas and thoughts. The well-known British linguist, Wilkins (1976) says people could describe few things without grammar, but they could express nothing without vocabulary. Widows (1987) thinks that native English speakers can understand language material with correct vocabulary but not so proper in grammar rules rather than those with correct grammar rules but not so proper in vocabulary use. Lord mentions that ‘vocabulary is by far the most sizable and unmanageable component in the learning of any language, whether for a foreign or one’s mother tongue because of thousands of different meanings’ (Lord, 1993:83).

Lewis (1992) holds the idea that vocabulary acquisition is the main task of second language acquisition and the language skills as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating all can not go without vocabulary.

There are several ways to show the meanings of an English word, through such aids as: 1) objects that can easily be brought to class(umbrellas, scissors, tools, buttons of many colors and sizes, etc); 2) drawings by the teacher and drawings by the students; 3) demonstrations to show actions(Allen, 1983:41).

There are varieties of activities in a classroom to help students learn target language effectively, such as games, music, dramatic stories, amusing anecdotes etc. Role-play is one of them. Role-play helps students learn effectively and use target language as freely and communicatively as they can. Role-play aims at fostering the ability of students and is characterized as mutual teaching and learning. It can realize the teaching model of “students play a principle role and the teacher plays a leading role” (Littlewood, 1981:56).

According to De Neve and Heppner (1997), the main steps of designing role-play are summarized as follows:

- Firstly, teachers should choose a situation for a role play, keeping in mind students’ needs and interests. Teachers should select role-plays that will give the students an opportunity to practice what they have learned.

- The next step is to come up with ideas on how this situation may develop. Students’ level of language proficiency should be taken into consideration.

- After finishing selecting a suitable role play, teachers should predict the language needed for it. It is recommended to introduce any new vocabulary before the role play.

- This step implies providing students with concrete information and clear role descriptions so that they could play their roles with confidence. Teachers should describe each role in a manner that will let the students identify with the characters.

- Teachers ask for some volunteers to act out role-play in front of the class in this step. It is recommended that teachers avoid intervening in a role play with error corrections not to discourage the students.

- Once the role play is finished, teachers should give feedback to students. This means pointing out students’ advantages and disadvantages.

Here is the one sample of role-play on using in EFL classes according to my experience: the teacher designs a communicative activity for the pupils in order to learn two adjectives—*impulsive*, *bad-tempered*,

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to consolidate what they have learned, pair-work, and develop their communicative abilities. She offers the pupils appropriate explanations of these two words, which are used to describe people's personality. Before assigning the task, she tells the pupils the instructions that the situation is to predict the partner's fate: one acts as a fortune teller, the other a customer; the pupils choose their own partners freely; the fortune teller predicts future events for the customer; some words in the role-play should concern the words what they have learned in the lesson. Then most pupils participate in the role-play actively. After they have finished performing the role-play, many pairs volunteer to demonstrate their performance before the whole class. The teacher assesses their advantages and disadvantages roughly. After the role-play, the pupils' anxiety and tension are relieved greatly from their facial expressions and behaviors. The teacher and the pupils are familiar with each other now. Nevertheless, classroom discipline will be a bit messy. Sometimes a few boys even chat with their desk mates. It takes twenty minutes.

Additionally, through the observation of the English lesson in EFL classes, we can think that role-play makes great demands upon the professional skills and competence of teachers. While using role-play activity teachers need to have other abilities as well as the proficiency of target language, such as organizing ability, insight into learners. Therefore, it is recommended that foreign language teachers should enhance their standard in order to improve the effects in practical teaching.

### **References**

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