

## THE INDISPENSIBILITY OF ROLE PLAY FOR THE CLASSROOM TEACHER: OVOM GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL ABA EXPERIMENT AS PARADIGM

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### Abstract

*The need for the classroom teacher to enliven his teaching methods with the use of participants based teaching methods and to properly involve the student as a participant in the teaching/ learning process rather than an observer gave rise to this paper which explores the characteristics and nature of role play for use by the teacher for his students. It was designed to help teachers to understand the rudiments, techniques, the use and integration of role play as an informal teaching method to spice up their teaching. Furthermore, it was to expose the advantages, importance and methods of using role-play in the classroom. This paper is predicated on the process –concept structural approach to drama as advocated by Siks, which simply implies following the conceptual framework of drama to design “activities involving students in the dramatic process”. The research which is participant action oriented was carried out in Ovom Girls High School, Aba with some of her teachers. The paper concludes that role play which is multidimensional and goal oriented is a veritable tool for a creative teacher to enliven his classroom lessons and recommends that more teachers should be exposed to the techniques of role play and encouraged to embrace this technique to spice their teaching methods.*

**Keywords:** Role Play, Teaching, Group Dynamics.

### Introduction

The nature of the child is such that he likes to pretend, imagine, act out roles and play out imaginations. He wants to be like his father, mother, elder sister or brother, teacher, doctor, pastor, engineer, etc. He cooks imaginary foods, builds a mansion on the ground and thereafter smashes it with his feet. Exploring these imaginative processes in the child's development has been discovered to be of immense importance to the total development of the child, physically, socially, morally and intellectually. Purcell observes that teachers use role play because they have observed that children/students like to “pretend, enjoy assuming another identity and are enthusiastic about imagining what their new character will do, how it will react and interact; what will happen to it in a make believe world” (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/34393>. Downloaded 2/7/2017. Similarly, Offoboche in Okome (215) describes role play as putting oneself in another person's shoes in order to understand the person. According to her, “it is seeing the event as another person, behaving as another and feeling as another person.” Role play has also been closely associated with simulation, situation, dramatics, speaking, motivation, sociodrama and

psychodrama. The most important thing to note here is that role players will react differently to situations, motivations and in speech when they are identifying another character different from themselves. Therefore, role play in a classroom situation can be broadly said to simply mean assuming a role different from oneself. That is, the role player assumes another character in order to understand the person he is portraying. Atakpo (67), submits that “When an actor (student) assumes roles other than himself, he is made to feel the pains and failures of the character other than himself”

It is this purgation of emotions that gives the student the opportunity to properly evaluate such roles to drop the bad ones to internalize the good ones. The teacher will also have the opportunity to evaluate how far the students have imbibed the lesson. . Also, Kodotchigova sees role-play as a “strategy which emphasize the social nature of learning and cooperative behaviour which is the outcome of participating in an activity as stimulating students both socially and intellectually” (<http://iteslj.org/Techniques/kodotchigova-RolePlay.html>. Downloaded 2/7/2015. Role play helps for the understanding and development of responsive, receptive and amenable attitude

towards the feeling of others. This is because role play conditions coordinate our internal and external relationship since it principally consists of the other person; that is the one you become while role playing and your real self. During explorations, you become another person, while still retaining your real self. It is this amalgamation that enables the role player to tune in properly to the role being played.

### **Characteristics of Role Play**

Di Pietro in Purcell lists three major characteristics of classroom role play as summarized below:

- i. It is goal oriented as all roles played must have an agenda to direct the roles being played.
- ii. It is multidimensional as it is not straight jacked but gives the role-player the option to choose how the role will be played.
- iii. It is paired. Pairing here is referred to sets of role with two matched or mismatched participants. Matched pairing is conventional with expected answer like buying and selling a material between a seller and a buyer, while mismatched is unconventional and requires bringing in another subject matter into a conversation. Instead of a seller telling a buyer how much he is selling a certain ware, he goes out of context to ask about politics or weather ([www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org)).

He therefore advised the teachers that a carefully planned use of role play can help both to teach the lesson and enhance the growth of the individual.

### **Historical Background**

Biblically, from Joshua Chapter 9 verses 1-9, we read of the story of the Gibeonites who used role play to secure a peace deal with the Israelites to avoid being annihilated by the all-conquering Israelites. They dressed in old clothes and worn out shoes, pretended to have come from a far country when they were Israel's next neighbors' they ate dry, decomposed and decayed bread to secure the desired peace deal. "And old shoes and clouted upon their feet... And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal and said unto him and to the men of is real: we come from a far country: now therefore make ye a league with us" (Holy Bible, 308) From their

actions and inactions, we are able to understand that they had a set goal which they played out through assuming another role, disguising themselves as strangers, eating rotten food, wearing torn clothes and old shoes.

Blatner ([http:// www.Blatner .com](http://www.Blatner.com). Downloaded 05/12/ 18) associated the origin of role play to ancient Greek theatre. According to him, the term role came from the "rolled up" scripts actors used over two thousand years ago. Later, the script became the part and actors were said to play the role of say Hamlet, Othello, Ophelia, Desdemona or any character they are portraying. Nda (42) agrees that role play originated from the great Greek theatrical era but further submits that role play became popular during the medieval period when the Roman Catholic Church was faced with the "problem of dealing with its fundamentally illiterate members. Most of the members were not educated and could not read. The official language for the mass (order of service) was Latin. Visual representations became necessary for easy understanding, comprehension and assimilation of church proceedings by the illiterate members. Majority of the productions were based on biblical stories which treated bible heroes. Payment of actors who participated in theatrical productions was based on roles played. But whoever played God was paid the highest amount as against anyone playing Satan. Nda (43) further observes that role play was used for character molding as those who misbehaved during productions were made to forfeit their salaries and even had to pay some fine in addition

However the credit for popularizing role play should be ascribed to Jacob Moreno (1889-1974). Moreno was a student of Sigmund Freud, the psychoanalyst. It is to the credit of Moreno that he successfully bridged the gap between psychoanalysis and psychodrama, through a bitter personal experience as a child. Scategni (11) reports that as a four year old boy, Moreno broke his arm while "Playing God and His Angels". Spurred by his wish to play the role of God, while his mates were playing the roles of angels, flapping their wings and singing, one of them asked Moreno to fly from there since he was playing God. Acting on the impulse and demands of the moment, he attempted to fly from the raised, high chairs that represented the throne of god and landed heavily on the ground with a broken arm. This experience of playing God was the first private session of

psychodrama and the "first manifestation of the idea of recreating the world psychodramatically", Scategni, (11) which was to guild Moreno later.

In 1921, during the April fool's day, Moreno organized the first official psychodrama session in Vienna theatre working with children and using role play as a major tool. Scategni (11) reports that Moreno allowed the children to become whatever they wanted to be. "I permitted them to play god if they wanted to. Thus when they missed, just as I was treated when my arm was broken, I began to treat children's problem by letting them act extemporaneously, a sort of psychotherapy for the gods". Thus, role play has continued to spread and its use has been felt across many disciplines.

### **Understanding Group Dynamics**

Understanding group dynamics is very important to the classroom teacher for effective utilization of the benefits accruable from the use of role play in the classroom. The class is composed of different children from different backgrounds and idiosyncrasies. It is important to note that every child in the class belongs to some type of group and even to several groups and continually gathers experiences as he mixes up with his peers. Social maturity is attained only through the continued cooperative interchange of these ideas. Class interaction, idea sharing and discussion as well as playing out experiences and thoughts of life gathered through the mixing together in and out of the class become educational, communicational and socially rewarding to the students when positively applied. Therefore, it is the obligation of the classroom teacher to properly harness and unite these differences in the students' attitudes and skills to achieve the desired goal, using role play. Since role play is multi-dimensional and usually paired, it will make group process effective and dynamic. Therefore, group dynamics is all about recognizing the different qualities in group (classroom) and harnessing them to achieve the desired or set goals.

### **Guide to the Application of Role Play**

This section will help guide a classroom teacher who wants to introduce role play in his classroom as a teaching tool and further strengthen and reinforce the efforts of the teacher who has been using the method. For the

teacher, warming up the class through exercises is very important. The takeoff, preparation and warm up activities before the proper role play begins acts as entry behaviour for the students and thus prepares the teacher to launch his lesson. Rodriguez and White in Purcell (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/34393>. Downloaded 2/7/2017) also suggested the use of familiar, simple and natural open language experiences based on communication needs "like a trip to the zoo, buying in a supermarket, launch at a fast food, learning to play soccer".

During role play after the warm-up exercises, the teacher will assume the role of the leader. He will create an enabling environment through dropping the garb of "a know all teacher" to become the leader and guide, while he crowns the student participants with the mantle of the expert. Iroh (99) observes that this will provide some kind of expertise, instill self-confidence and ability in the students who will now be able to "weigh and judge matters objectively as people who have experienced it", and to play out chosen roles as well as teach the teacher. The teacher, now a leader becomes a guide, carefully guiding and explaining the goals of the project, making useful suggestions to the group, before, during and at intervals and after the playing out (reflection, discussion and evaluation period). The teacher must be careful not to dictate or assign roles. Forced participation destroys spontaneity and defeats the noble purpose of role playing experience. When the role play is in session, the teacher should be an observer, taking notes. His contribution should be in the form of suggestions not an order or as an authority, stress the importance of listening to all those not participating during the role play session. This is because during reflection, all the class will be involved, and reflection period is very crucial to the realization of the objectives of role play. During reflection, let the discussion centre on the "what" has been played and "why", exclude the how. What is to be evaluated is the outcome of the exercise to see if the goal was achieved. Reflection presents a great avenue for the review of teaching through role reversal. During this period, verbal skills are increased, self-esteem and leadership qualities are enhanced. Again the leader's role is indispensable. It is here that learning takes place. The leader must encourage free expression, posing provocation questions

and encouraging all audience (class) participation.

### **Benefits of Role Play**

Generally, the gains accruing from the use of role play to both the teacher and the student include:

- i. It will make the students to be more objective because they have indirectly experienced what they would not ordinarily experience through playing such roles.
- ii. It will improve the child's imagination, increase verbal skills, and improve language of the participants
- iii. It removes rote learning, note cramming and induces internalization of lessons which is intrinsically driven
- iv. It enables the students to make better judgment about certain decisions which cannot be easily overturned thus leading to their acceptance and being assigned leadership roles
- v. It enables students to discover and appreciate the nuances of the target culture after playing such roles. Therefore it encourages a sympathetic and accepted attitude towards such cultures.
- vi. The multidimensional nature of role play transcends beyond the classroom to sensitize and stimulate the students through roles played. This is because during role playing session, the students will become what they are not but aspire to be like the noble characters (virtue) while rejecting the bad characters (vices) after playing such roles. Most importantly, it provides opportunity for teachers to review, reflect and evaluate what has been taught.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper is based on the process-concept structural approach to drama as advocated by Siks (4), which simply implies following the conceptual framework of drama to design "activities involving students in the dramatic process". According to her, dramatic concepts are based on principles that are fundamental to learning and allow the child the opportunity to participate in the process through "perceiving, responding, imagining, creative (improvising and forming), communication and evaluation" (4). The process - concept structural theory primarily exists for the teacher or leader and provides a guide for designing activities or lesson and involving children/ students in the dramatic/ learning process. This serves as an integrative force in children's learning. Here

integration means bringing together different parts into a whole. The process entails the involvement of the whole person which implies that the individual responds and behaves in a unified manner (whole) because of the unifying effects of the internal and external forces in drama. The process-concept structural approach understands the developmental needs of children and individuals within the group and through participation; it takes care of the group's multifarious composition of the class, giving equal opportunities and accommodation for them to function optimally.

The process makes the teacher to be sensitive to the individual child within the scope of the demand of the creative drama experience makes on each child. This is achieved by exploring each learning experience and dramatic event along with the player. The emphasis of the process - concept structural approach is on participation and involvement of the child/ student in the teaching/learning process which is the main pivot of this research and which principally makes the theory the most central to this research.

### **The Workshop**

Akpan posits that games and exercises ginger participants in improvisations as they act as an energizer and helps in no small way in setting the pace in the process of story building. According to her "Warm-up exercise allow the participants to get familiar with and feel comfortable working with their fellow players... games allow the participants to learn how to develop character and other necessary improvisational rules" (149). It is because of the above assertions and advantages of warm up exercises that the researcher emphasized the need for a teacher to warm up his class or students with games or exercises before starting his lesson. The researcher thereafter introduced simple warm up exercise by asking them to "stand up and sit down". This was done rhythmically for seven times with increasing pace. Again, while standing up, they were asked to "hands up and hands down". This was also repeated for seven times. After that we did "eyes close and eyes open". When they closed their eyes, the researcher asked them to think out something or anything. After some seconds, they were asked to open their eyes. This allowed for imaginative development.

After the exercises, the participants were divided into three groups (A, B, C) to explore the subject matter as they sought to find answers to the questions posed above. The group A is to explore the meaning of value; importance of value to the society and factors that promote good values to the society. Group B will explore honesty; attributes of honesty and the consequences of dishonesty while Group C will explore cooperation; factors that promote cooperation and the benefits cooperation. Leaders were nominated by the participants for each group for easy coordination. The workshop lasted for four weeks. The school authority graciously allowed the researcher to use the free and break periods of Monday, Wednesday and Thursday. The first week was used to introduce the theme as well as selecting topics for role play and while the remaining weeks were used for the story building, acting out and discussion. It was designed to help teachers in the secondary school to understand the rudiments, techniques, the use and integration of role play as an informal teaching method to spice up their teaching.

Furthermore, it was to expose the advantages, importance and methods of using role-play in the classroom. It is a train the trainer workshop. The researcher took out time to explain the role of the teacher during role play, as a facilitator and guide who will direct and control activities during the session and deemphasize "the know all" attitude of the teacher centered method. Majority of the participants (teachers) are already aware of the use of dramatic methods in teaching some subjects. When the researcher asked the participants to mention some of the subjects that can be taught using dramatic methods, mention were made of Literature, History, Arithmetic, Home Economics, Civic and Social Education among others. This gladdened the researcher as it formed the entry behavior for the experiment as the participants are aware of the use of the dramatic methods in teaching. Through a consensus, the session settled for Civic Education.

The researcher used the story telling and question methods to introduce and discuss "our values" in civic education as the demonstration topic. We made our lesson plan for the topic and proceeded to build the story with the school's scheme of work as our guide. This is to enable us incorporate all the lesson objectives into the

story to be acted out. The major technique adopted in the story building process is improvisation. The following questions were posed by the researcher to the participants:

- a. What is the meaning of values?
- b. What is the importance of values to the society?
- c. What are the factors that promote good value system in society?
- d. What is honesty?
- e. What are attributes of honesty?
- f. What are the consequences of dishonesty?
- g. What is cooperation?
- h. What are the factors that promote cooperation?
- i. What are the benefits of cooperation?

The participants were divided into three groups to explore the sub topics from "our values" The first group is to explore the meaning and importance of values as well as factors that promote values in the society. The second group will explore honesty; attributes of honesty and the consequences of dishonesty while the third group will explore cooperation; factors that promote cooperation and the benefits of cooperation.

After the group sessions which lasted for two weeks and were guided by the researcher, the groups were dissolved and the topics were acted out with each group taking turns.

### Findings

The main reason of the training the trainer is to popularize the method among the teachers who are to use it in their respective classrooms and make it more amenable to them. Dramatic method of role play helped in the clarification and simplification of concepts. According to Mrs Agnes who teaches Civic Education in the school and participated in the story building and acting out;

The workshop has indeed broadened my views and exposed me to other methods to teach the subject. The story building process enabled me to juxtapose some of my personal opinions with that of my colleagues thereby enabling me to make proper judgments. Furthermore, through my participation, both in the story building and acting, some confusing concepts and their application have been clearly understood.

Also another participant Mrs Jane Okorie who took part in the workshop attests that during the story building period, she shared the thoughts and ideas of other participants which have improved the way she relate to other people. According to her:

The workshop has thought me to be flexible with my ideas as I had to drop some and imbibed some. My participation has also assisted my interpersonal relationship with others but most importantly it will now enable me to accommodate the opinions of my students and give them more opportunities to express themselves in my class.

For Mrs Okeke, a science teacher in the school:

I agreed to participate just to have fun. It was fun indeed but beyond having fun, there are some intrinsic lessons I have learnt about role play which I will henceforth apply in my teaching especially the dramatization and 'practicalization' of some aspects of my teachings. Above all, the experience has reinforced in me the need to be a good listener and the need for cooperation to achieve a common goal.

From the above responses from the participants, it is evident that role play encouraged cooperation and collective decision making; enhanced communication and listening skills as well as improved imaginative capacity; practical participation and contribution of ideas, joyful learning and internalization.

### Conclusion

The need for the classroom teacher to adopt creative teaching methods and enliven his teaching/lessons to arrest the attention of the students in the teaching/learning situation is the pivot of this work. The use of the dramatic method of role play clearly answers this clarion call. This work therefore, exposed the importance, characteristics, nature and benefits of role play to both the classroom teacher and his students. It traced the historical background of role play and stressed the need for a classroom teacher to understand group dynamics to effectively harmonize and achieve set goals. It further outlined simple steps for the classroom teacher to adopt while using role play in the classroom. The paper concludes that role

play which is multidimensional and goal oriented is a veritable tool for a creative teacher to enliven his classroom lesson, sensitize and stimulate the students as to develop their innate abilities and self-esteem through roles played. This is because during the role playing session, the students will become what they are not but aspire to be like the noble characters (virtue) while rejecting the bad characters (vices) after playing such roles. This will further improve their sense of judgment; make them independent and self-reliant.

The paper recommends that if the much talked about educational advancement is to be attained, more teachers should embrace this technique to spice their teaching methods thus "freeing" the students from all inhibitions to make a way for proper internalization and utilization of the learnt lessons by the students.

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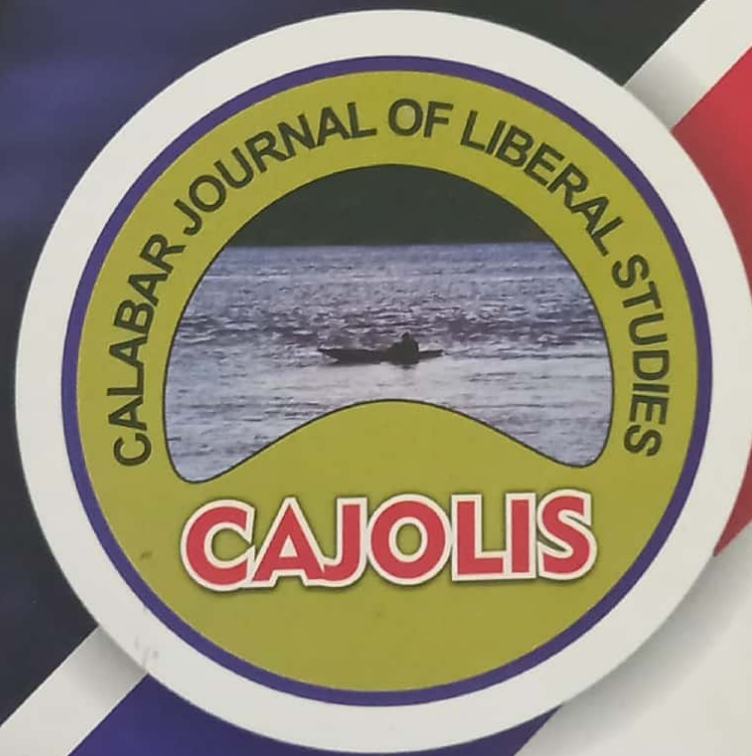
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