RESEARCH ARTICLE

ROLE PLAY: A TEACHING STRATEGY THAT ADDS FUN IN LEARNING

*Shehla Khan

Aga Khan University School of Nursing and Midwifrey, Stadium Road, P. O.Box3500, Karachi 74800, Pakistan

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	There are many strategies used by nurse educators to ensure that students of the health professions develop professional competence. Experiential approaches used in nursing education include role playing, gaming, simulation, practical exercises. Among these activities, Role play has a competitive element that does not exist in didactic lecturing, simulations or practical exercises. This paper will focus on the use of a role play as a teaching strategy to support classroom learning in the health sciences nursing education .The nursing literature highlights many reasons for using role play as a teaching Strategy, including the promotion of active learning, encouragement for critical thinking, the value of fun and excitement in learning, and replication of real-life situations. The use of Role Play can promote the development of user's creativity, autonomy, responsibility and other decision related skills.

INTRODUCTION

Games can increase student motivation, help students retain knowledge and develop the capacity to solve problems, and have a positive impact on learning outcomes. Ultimately, it is the educator's responsibility to choose teaching strategies that best suit the needs of the curriculum and are likely to facilitate the achievement of course objectives. According to the literature Nurse Educators can use many teaching strategies when developing curricular and course content. However, the use of Role play seems to have polarized nurse faculty. The use of role play in the teaching/learning process does not only bring about enthusiasm and pleasure, but also enhance motivation, and ultimately benefit the process. The nursing literature highlights many reasons for using role play as a teaching strategy, including the promotion of active learning, encouragement for critical thinking, the value of fun and excitement in learning, and replication of real-life situations. Active learning is particularly important because such learning stimulates interest, increases motivation, and relates topics to real-life scenarios, all of which have the potential to make learning more fun. This paper will examine this technique in detail. The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (1978 edition) definition of role-playing is: *'behaving in* accordance with specified function'. This is accurate but a working definition of role-play is more difficult to arrive at largely because it is associated with 'dramatic' activity in the minds of teachers, and also because of confusion in the literature arising from its relatedness to play, games and simulation. According to
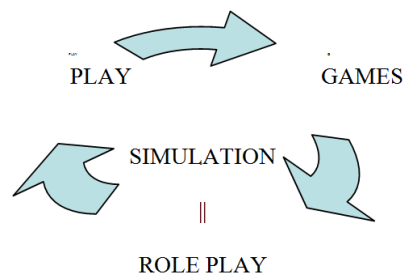
(Gabrielle McSharry, 2000) Role-play is a product of 'play', 'games' and simulation'. The definitions of these are provided in Table 1

Table 1. Working definitions of role-play's relatives

Play: A behavior used during the development of children to learn about their environment which produces enjoyment (Piaget, 1951). The 'environment' includes physical objects, interactions and societal rules of conduct.

Games: *Games are like play except that they usually have an end, a payoff'* (Adams, 1973). Games have conserved rules which can be used in competition with the hope of winning (Piaget,1932).

Simulation: is the *'imitation of conditions, pretending to have or be something'* (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 1978). In education, simulation is often referred to as 'simulation games', which are usually more controlled than being mere extensions of games, and are *'detailed models intended to reflect a situation found in the real world'* (Adams, 1973).

According to (van Ments, 1983), role play is 'a type of communication.' It is a form of simulation, not reality, and it is 'one particular type of simulation that focuses attention on the interaction of people with one another.'Sogorno brings together the concepts of role and role play, and provides the following definition: a learning activity in which participants act out a set of defined role behaviors (*sic*) or position with a view to acquiring desired experiences. A role-playing scenario could be mimicking, demonstrative or illustrative of specific concepts, problems or situations.

Corresponding author: **Shehla Khan,**
Aga Khan University School of Nursing and Midwifrey, Stadium Road, P. O.Box3500, Karachi 74800, Pakistan.

PLAY   →   GAMES

SIMULATION

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ROLE PLAY

Fig. 1. Play, games and simulation (Gabrielle McSharry, 2000)

Footnote: In science education role-play may be seen as an interaction between these three components – either in combination or by themselves – and the child who' performs' the activity, resulting in learning outcomes as shown in Fig 1
The role play concept has many advantages: It is unique in its capacity to interpret phenomena at many levels of human organization, interpersonal, family, organization, and even interactions within the larger culture. Its association with drama and the arts and its roots in the play of childhood gives the exercise of this skill some of the excitement and challenge of a game, adding motivation to the learning process. And finally, its association with a technique which can be used for both education and therapy makes it especially heuristic. (Burns, Alvin and Gentry, James 1998) Role playing is a derivative of psychodrama and utilizes a wide range of other techniques which enhance the process (Gabrielle McSharry, 2000). For example, if students are exploring the problem of telling family members that a patient has died, the first and most obvious technique is to role play the predicament of the family member, say, the spouse. The unspoken as well as expressed thoughts are brought out. Working from the position of what would be the best and worst things for the chaplain, therapist, or doctor to say from the point of the bereaved, the group members could take turns trying out a variety of approaches. The technique of "replay" allows participants to correct mistakes, and the technique of "mirroring" gives those who play a role some feedback as to how they were perceived by others in the group. Another technique which can enhance the effectiveness of a role playing learning situation is to have the students read up on the psychosocial aspects of the condition(s) to be discussed in the next session. This adds an element of intellectual discipline, but it's the actual role taking which brings out the nuances and the feel of the situation which can never be gleaned from the journals or texts. That's why it's called experiential education.

Literature Review

Role play is an innovative teaching strategy that research has shown to be effective for improving nursing student learning outcomes. Specifically, role play enhances retention of knowledge, promotes problem-based learning, and motivates nursing students to become more engaged in their learning. The literature also indicates that the use of role play during nursing education promotes active learning, encourages critical thinking, makes learning more exciting, and can replicate real-life scenarios. Role-playing as a teaching strategy offers several advantages for both teacher and Student. First, student interest in the topic is raised. Research has shown that "integrating Experiential learning activities in the classroom increases interest of the student in the subject Matter and understanding of course content" (Poorman, 2002). Students share their experiences that when teacher does not involve the students the classes becomes boring but if the students are involved in activities like role playing they become much more interested in the material no Matter if the material is very dry. Secondly, there is increased involvement on the part of the students in a role playing lessons. Students are not passive recipients of the instructor's knowledge. Rather, they take an active part. (Poorman, 2002) Observes that "true learning cannot take place when students are passive observers of the teaching process". It is observed when role play is used there is more involvement of students and thus more learning takes place .According to the (Poorman, 2002) using role-play as a teaching strategy is that it teaches empathy and understanding of different perspectives. A typical role playing activity would have students taking on a role of a character, learning and acting as that individual would do in the typical setting. (Poorman, 2002) found "a significant increase among students in feeling another's distress as their own" .One possible use of role-playing might be to introduce a topic, using the students 'background knowledge (schema) to introduce and interest them in a new unit of study (Lloyd, 1998) But probably 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). Skilled teachers have generally used skits, plays, newscasts, and other forms of drama to motivate students when new information is introduced.

Role playing/simulation is an extremely valuable method for learning. It encourages thinking and creativity, lets students develop and practice new language and behavioral skills in a relatively nonthreatening setting, and can create the motivation and involvement necessary for learning to occur. Students learn best & long lasting when they get involved in teaching process, Teaching environment also facilitate their learning. They always prefer to learn in active environment where they have a freedom of asking & sharing. When we make them responsible for their learning then they show they are the best. In basic sciences we use different teaching strategies like lecture format, discussion, videos, concept mapping & role plays. Students can easily apply the concepts & knowledge of basic science in clinical areas & community if they get this information in an active & real environment where they see the application during teaching. If we create a light & lively environment for students then it gives better opportunity to memories & then synthesize. Class room can be made lively with the active participation of students; it increases their self-confidence, accountability & creativity. Selection of a suitable strategy is always a difficult task for teacher especially in support science course where we have to focus on application & critical thinking. The teacher defines the general structure of the role play, but generally does not actively participate once the structure is set. To quote (Jones, 1982) "...the teacher becomes the Controller, and controls the event in the same way as a traffic controller, helping the flow of traffic and avoiding bottlenecks, but not telling individuals which way to go." Again, this is consistent with (Scarcella and Oxford, 1992) principles. Rather than a traditional, teacher- centered classroom structure, the teacher keeps a relatively low profile and students are free to interact with each other spontaneously. This reduces student anxiety and facilitates learning.

The teacher must take on some additional responsibilities in role playing/simulation. In particular, the teacher must keep learners motivated by stimulating their curiosity and keeping the material relevant, creating a "tension to learn" (Burns,

Alvin and Gentry, James 1998). 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 (Poorman, 2002). 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 turbulent times in history (Steindorf, 2001).

Role playing is a methodology derived from sociodrama that may be used to help students understand the more subtle aspects of literature, social studies, and even some aspects of science or mathematics. Further, it can help them become more interested and involved, not only learning about the material, but learning also to integrate the knowledge in action, by addressing problems, exploring alternatives, and seeking novel and creative solutions. Role playing is the best way to develop the skills of initiative, communication, problem-solving, self-awareness, and working cooperatively in teams, and these are above all--certainly above the learning of mere facts, many if not most of which will be obsolete or irrelevant in a few years--will help these young people be prepared for dealing with the challenges of the Twenty-First Century. For role-play and simulation to be successful, 100% participation from the students should take place. The discussions require a great deal of mental activity as each student tries to express himself to show his understanding and to relate what is being said with his own opinions. Thus opportunities to generate language use arise. The problems of discipline and motivation can also be reduced. Learning is active and not passive when role-play and simulation are used. They require mental and physical activity e.g. gesturing to put forward a point. The students have to concentrate in order to participate effectively. This would leave little room for playing tricks or getting into mischief. In fact such negative behavior can be diverted into the role-play and simulation activities, which ironically can make the situation more interesting. Since the situations in these activities are often related to real life, the students will see the relevance and they may be more motivated to participate and to use the target language. Some students have fixed ideas as to what a good class teacher is. They expect a rigid, fixed procedure in her teaching. They are used to being passive and expect teaching to be teacher-centered. Attitudes like these have to be changed. Before this can be done the teacher's attitudes have to be changed too. She must accept her new role where she does not dominate the class anymore. She is now the observer and must gradually withdraw and allow the student to take over without having the fear of losing control.

Role-play and simulation take a lot of time especially if they include preparation and follow-up work. It also depends on the ability of the class to perform the tasks. The teacher thus has to know the class well so as to assign the students activities to suit their abilities. Time constraints are especially felt in examination classes which have a set syllabus to follow and to complete. The lack of space and the large number of students can make the organization of the activities difficult. Noise level will also be high especially, if the size of the classroom is small thus making concentration difficult. Monitoring of the different groups may also be a problem. The teacher thus has to adapt and improvise accordingly, for instance looking for an alternative place or even carrying out the activity outdoors. The advantages and disadvantages of role-play and simulation discussed here are not exhaustive. However, by bearing them

in mind, it is hoped that they would help the teacher be better prepared as she launches out to use role-play and simul It is better to follow the simple rules of feedback- where the participants are asked how it went, what emotions they experienced in the classroom. The groups will then give positive and constructive feedback. It is often useful after debrief to summarize what was gained- by asking each participant for their points learnt or understood. Thus it is a powerful and effective teaching method for children and adult and can be adapted to deliver any learning objectives from simple to complex concepts.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The use of role-play in adult and higher education has been examined in numerous educational contexts. Researchers and practitioners from a range of disciplines have found that the use of role-play as a learning activity has improved learners understanding and engagement (Bolton and Heathcote, 1999; Harris and Harris, 1996; Luca and Heal, 2006; Cutler and Hay, 2000; Raphael and O'Mara, 2002) suggests that when students work together inclusively and co-operatively they are not merely learning social skills but rather the associated emotions of these social experiences, which are stored as integral parts of the scientific or mathematical procedure about which they are learning.It would seem that the emotions associated with the social interactions that occur in learning activities are fundamental in securing the long-term retention of the actual concepts being studied. The use of Role Play can promote the development of users' creativity, autonomy, responsibility and other decision related skills. The use of these games for learning is an immediate consequence of the need to put learners in a context where they must develop their knowledge in an effective way, that is, through visualization, interaction with the environment and other game characters (avatars or not) and decision making. Overall, role-play is a beneficial teaching tool as it develops practical professional skills as well as academic knowledge. Students generally enjoy this hands-on approach to learning and broaden their understanding of multi-stakeholder negotiations through a process of simulated experience.

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