

Techniques of Eliciting Data from the Farmers Through Roleplay



Sociology

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ABSTRACT

Lively learning is what we are all interested in. However, to make students participate enthusiastically in a learning process, adopting effective teaching methods is equally important for a teacher. There are many types of instructional teaching methods and one among them is role – playing. Various literatures defended that performing role play stimulates student’s intelligence. Their theories may be correct in scientific means where, students are allowed to express themselves in a scientific background and develop the understanding of difficult concepts. But in social studies, where the main focus is on people and society, in what way role-play is useful among students? To assess this, an act was performed by B.Sc., Agriculture graduates of Vanavarayar Institute of Agriculture in the theme “eliciting data from the farmers in a village”. From their performance evaluation, it was found that, role-playing as a teaching approach offered several advantages for both teacher and student. The integrated experiential learning in the classroom increased the interest of the student in the subject and also made them understand the feeling of another’s suffering as their own. Discussion was also made with the students asking them to state their experience after playing their roles. Many expressed that, role-play taught them to be empathetic and get involved in the character while acting. Some even stated that it induced their creativity. Based on the remarks and debates, one thing was very clear that performing role-play in social studies will emphasize the social nature of learning, gives life and immediacy to academic material that can be largely descriptive and theoretical and stimulates student’s intellectual participation. This article will serve as a base for developing strategies for communal learning in future.

INTRODUCTION

Role-play is a product of ‘play’, ‘games’ and ‘simulation’ (Gabrielle McSharry, 2000). In science education, role-play may be seen as an interaction between these three components – either in combination or by themselves – and students who perform such activities results in learning outcome. In the context of social studies, role-play is used to learn the issues and decisions of the past and how things might have been different in local community in a broader setting. Aside from knowledge acquisition, preparing and conducting a role-play activity strengthens students’ knowledge, acquisition skills, their creativity, their values clarification skills and a variety of interpersonal skills identified in the curriculum outcomes. As an effective instructional teaching strategy, role-playing emphasizes the social nature of learning and sees cooperative behaviour as stimulating students both socially and intellectually. To assess all these statements, I decided to do an active study with the B.Sc. Agricultural Graduates by putting forward the following questions:

- Is role-playing a useful tool for students?
- Does role-play create meaningful learning to students who are exposed to rural situation and farmers?

I gave students role playing projects as well as taught them with lectures on how to use its experience while they go for survey in a village interviewing farmers. Exclusive results emerged from their performance and through discussion and all these have been explained in detail with supporting reviews. This study will also help whether or not role-playing is a reliable type of active learning to use in classroom and will help others to develop strategies for communal learning in future.

How did this idea of conducting role-play in a classroom atmosphere emerged?

I always enjoyed active learning ever since I was a student. Now, being a rural sociology teacher for agriculture graduates, I wanted their learning to be project-centered learning. There are many types in instructional teaching. So far what we have come across is routine presentation and black board teaching. These teaching methods will deteriorate learner’s interest and weakens his/her interacting ability with the teacher. Hence, to avoid such conflicts, an idea to conduct group role-play by involving

the students in a concept, making them do preliminary research on the topic and allowing them to learn on their own through stage performance emerged. Although, role-play is a part of student’s course curriculum, this pilot work was carried out with a motto of making the students learn in social nature and fitting them within the social family of models.

LESSON LEARNT THROUGH ROLE-PLAY

One may argue that the role-play approach is not able to attain its objectives and thus is not suitable for teaching rural sociology. The opposite argument is put forward here. Basically, the intention of role-play is not to prevent students from behaving in a way they normally do instead, making them aware about the difficulty and nebulousness in constructing social problems. One must also understand that besides raising awareness, the value of the role-play is its potential to stimulate behavioural changes. This part of the article briefly describes about the role-play design, four phases of role-play and role-play implementation.

Role-play design:

To effectively unfold the advantages of role-play, students were assigned a group project. A crop was suggested with the following theme “If you go to three different villages that vary in climate, topography and slope and find farmers cultivating that crop, how would you gather information from them and transfer their data to policy makers stating their constraints”. This theme was then related with four main phases of a role-play namely formulating, elaborating, performing and reflecting.

Formulating

Role-plays are not stand alone technique. They are embedded in learning strategy and contribute to the course objectives (Ments, 1994). While formulating the theme, the objectives and functions of role-play was well stressed among students. They were asked to keep role-play as focal point and revolve their concept within it. Initially students faced some constraints with time and space. But then sufficient time and space was provided to them within classroom to formulate their concept. From this experience, I learnt two things. First, a classroom must be suitable and spacious for implementing a role-play. Second, it should be equally supported by time for feedback at the end.

Elaborating

An essential part of each role-play is elaborating the actors about the situation and the characteristics of their role. For this purpose, the role scenario and role description was scripted by the students themselves based on the crop and concept assigned to them. The reason for scripting role scenario was to set a background for a particular problem and its associated constraints and role description was to provide the profile of people involved in the character. Lessons learnt from this are, scenario and description are always close to the actual situation and problems hence, irrelevant facts and too many conflicts should be avoided. Students were then advised to keep their dialogues simple with clear and common language. To create confidence and to ease understanding and knowledge construction, elaborating the character should be written in simple, clear language and be based on existing experience and knowledge of the students (Livingston, 1983; Steinwachs and Sugar, 1990).

Performing

There are several forms of performing a role-play. Which form is chosen depends on the objectives of role-play and the extent to which students are involved. In the present study, single role-play was performed by each group of students while the other groups observed the performance. The reason for making them perform single role-play was because one whole group at a time can share and discuss its observation. Other reason as stated by (Ments, 1994) was that, groups that perform role-play may provide additional information, manages time and motivates other students and intervene in case of poor performance or emotional escalation.

Reflecting

Reflecting is one of the most important activities in role-play. According to Deneve and Heppner (1997), during reflection, students step back and discuss what happened in the role-play, identify the reasons for the observed behaviour and outcomes as well as draw conclusions for improvement. Reflection can be achieved by posing questions verbally discussed in the classroom or answered in written documents (McSharry and Jones, 2000). In the present study, reflection was placed immediately after the role-play. It was found that students could able to recall their behaviour and observation.

Overall, it was understood that, if rural sociology is considered as a discipline that requires students to solve socio-technical problems of the farmers by collaboratively engaging in a process of knowledge production and sense making, exercise like role-play will provide constructive view of learning and offers fruitful, epistemological basis for designing effective module for collecting data from a village. Role-play refers to the assumption of constructivism and, if properly designed, promises to be an effective teaching technique in rural sociology.

Role-play implementation:

This part explains how role-play was conducted in the classroom setting and what was understood in each stage of role-play. Several things were considered while conducting role and they are all as follows,

- Physical setting like room, furniture placement and necessary equipment was ensured because those are appropriate for the nature of role-play
- Props and consumes provide more authentic experience while performing role-play. But, in the present study, since no special time was allotted for the students to perform with necessary costumes, they were asked to concentrate on their roles alone.
- The issue and its real-life setting was rehearsed and reviewed prior to performance. In the present study, the issue was kept as eliciting data from the farmer in a village and identifies their socio-economic status, natural resource management, their extent of adoption of agricultural technologies and constraints. The real-life setting was given weightage along with the character of each student participated in role-play. Some peculiar characters performed by students as noted by the teacher was farmer, agricultural

officer (AO), assistant agricultural extension officer (AAO), land owner, private parties, and scientists of ICAR/TNAU agricultural research stations.

- Unless playing a specific character, a teacher's role should be limited. He should only provide occasional and procedural advice as appropriate. At no time, he should attempt to influence or favored a particular viewpoint. In the present study also, my part as teacher was silent observation and role performance evaluation.
- Role-play activity should have an appropriate real-life conclusion such as a statement or decision announcement by the head of a commission, judge or mayor. Likewise, here the theme was to collect the data from the farmer, identify their constraint and communicate the same to the Agricultural Officer for solution. Little more to my expectation, the student lived with the real-life character and performed their rolls exceptionally well. This was really helping me to assess their knowledge level in the subject and at the same time their understanding about the current problem in the rural society.

CONCLUSION

Based on the experimental study, role-play proved to be an effective technique for teaching in social sciences. It puts sociology into a more realistic and pragmatic perspective and helps students to experience and understand the complexity and vagueness of social problems. The books and other resources may have provided a good base for the methods and instruments to secure rigor in social approach, but it is role-play that creates a more realistic research environment where they are confronted with the problem-owner and the issue of relevance. As such, students gain valuable skills and knowledge for setting up projects and communicating on rigor as well as relevance. However, to be effective, role-play should be linked with other elements of the course, guided by balanced role scenario and description, embedded in a flexible course design and offer sufficient reflection moments after each activity. Having evaluated the student's performance, it was concluded that, role-playing as a teaching approach offered several advantages for both teacher and student. The integrated experiential learning in the classroom increased the interest of the student in the subject and also made them understand the feeling of another's suffering as their own. Discussion was also made with the students asking them to state their experience after playing their roles. Many expressed that, role-play taught them to be empathetic and get involved in the character while acting. Some even stated that it induced their creativity. Based on the remarks and debates, one thing was very clear that performing role-play in social studies will emphasize the social nature of learning, gives life and immediacy to academic material that can be largely descriptive and theoretical and stimulates student's intellectual participation.

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