

## Puppetry as a Catalyst in Role-Play: A Device to Facilitate Gaining New Insights into the Perspectives of Others

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**Abstract:** Role-play is a powerful learning strategy that promotes the learners to broaden their perspectives, especially in complex situations like classroom teaching. Using puppetry creates a psychological distance from the player's identity, and the players' anxiety for the evaluation apprehension is reduced. The case study of the puppetry role-play in microteaching shows that the players can play various roles as though in a realistic situation. The possibility of puppetry as a catalyst interface for face-to-face CSSL systems is discussed.

### Introduction

Role-play is widely used as a method to provide students the opportunity to fully engage in the learning activity, and attain a variety of insights about the social, historical, or scientific phenomenon (Forsyth, 1999; Ladousse, 1989; Resnick & Wilensky, 1997). Role-play is also especially recognized as a suitable technique for the study of dynamic, complex, non-routine situations; in decision-making training such as crisis management, nursing or medical; and in teaching classrooms. One interesting aspect of these kinds of role-play is to emphasize improvisation rather than scripted scenarios. Improvisation in role-play is a particularly powerful learning strategy to achieve, in that biases can be overcome through the development of new beliefs (Friedman, 2004). This is because in such role-play, actors are sometimes required to behave counter-attitudinally, and those improvisations are often based on the role players' experience and reflections in part of their daily life.

The importance of such improvisations can be explained in terms of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. According to Bakhtin (1986), all utterances can be seen as replies to the voice of another person who preceded him, since the speaker will take into account the listener's background knowledge, previous utterances, gestures, etc. in predicting the listener's likely refutation. In this way, one's utterance will be formed with the anticipated words of the listener in mind, while at the same time the follow-up response of the listener will also be foreseen. In this sense, it can be said that utterances themselves constitute dialogue. In this dialogic view, decision-making and negotiations in the complex situation is nothing other than the process of forecasting the reactions of the actors in the situation, engaging in hypothetical dialogues, and incorporating the results into how to deal with the situation. Thus, involving improvisation is crucial because the role-play requires the ability to vividly imagine a diversity of actors' voices that are rooted in the values and backgrounds of each participant.

However, some of the participants still cannot play their roles very well due to being overly self-conscious (Ladousse, 1989) or evaluation apprehension (Cottrell et al., 1968). For example, the microteaching role-play in pre-service training requires the participants to play their roles collaboratively as a teacher and young pupils, and to simulate an actual classroom in order to demonstrate teaching in a real-life context. However, the reactions and feedbacks provided by colleagues acting as pupils are sometimes out of context, since they must play the role of much younger people. Their reactions and feedbacks cannot be ensured to be serious, honest, or realistic due to embarrassment or hesitation.

### Puppetry as a Catalyst to Facilitate Gaining Perspectives in Role Play

In order to scaffold the effective dialogic imagination in role-play, puppetry can be a useful device for allowing people to engage in the improvisation and elicit various reactions or responses from the participants.

The most important function of puppetry is that it allows each participant to obtain participant-observer balance and foster his/her participation by creating a clear separation between self (puppeteer) and non-self (puppet) while creating a puppetry story. The non-self, or puppet, also contains recognizable elements of the self which the puppeteer can identify with. Such projection in puppetry is considered to provide a 'margin of safety' manipulated by the puppeteer to achieve a balance between underdistance and overdistance (Aronoff, 2005). For example, it is possible for the puppets to "talk" about sensitive topics that would otherwise be unacceptable for an actor to discuss in a drama (Panford et al., 2001). Thus, puppets can be considered as a powerful distance device to elicit much more inner emotions or unconscious experiences regarding a problematic situation.

## A Case Study of Puppetry in Microteaching Role-Play

The case study was conducted in microteaching (which is ill-structured problem solving situation) role-play, based on a “Desk top teaching simulation game” (Sakamoto, 1980) that took place on a table set up as a miniature classroom with puppets. The players were acted out as actual students in real situations. The players (two female and two male senior students) could not role-play realistic students very well in the microteaching exercise in the university class - even after their internship in the actual schools. In the case study, we decided to use animal dolls rather than human-shaped dolls in order to create a distance between the dolls and puppeteers’ themselves in the role-play (see Figure 1 for details).

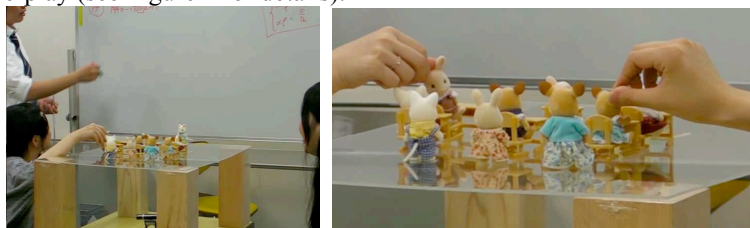


Figure 1. Scenes from the experiment

(Left male wearing a tie played a teacher; two females played students and the supervisor (at the right front))

As a result of a detailed analysis of the video of the case study, it was shown that (1) puppetry can elicit various roles that were not reflected the player’s identity, such as slow or irregular students; (2) puppetry can duplicate backchannel in the classroom that sometimes supports student-centered knowledge building or fosters cooperative reciprocal teaching that cannot appear in microteaching by self-role-play; (3) puppetry can foster the players to conduct various roles using multiple dolls; and (4) puppetry can foster the players to express possible non-verbal actions using verbal expressions that can be recorded by computers or videos.

## Conclusion

We have introduced the new possibility of puppetry as a device to facilitate gaining new insights on the perspectives of others in role-play, for learning about complex situations. Using puppetry creates a psychological distance from the player’s identity so that the players’ anxiety for the evaluation apprehension is reduced, and have presented empirically that the players can play various roles as if in a realistic situation. Especially in face-to-face collaborative learning, such as the tabletop collaborative negotiation (e.g. urban planning in Sugimoto et al. (2004), etc.), this will be an indispensable interface that should be a catalyst to elicit multivoice in inner emotional worlds or unconscious experience, and help learners to broaden their perspectives that blend the experience, knowledge and beliefs of multiple imaginary actors.

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