Huff, C. (2012). Action research on using role play activity in an adult ESL level one class

The researcher's belief in the communicative approach to teaching language led him to research how instruction can be arranged to bring about low-level / low-literacy students' success with a communicative, meaningful role play task? Often low level learners struggle with how to complete communicative activities. In a three week unit, the researcher taught an ESL level one class the skills needed to do a role play activity, and on the last day the students attempted to prepare and present role plays of calling to make a doctor's appointment. Data was collected through field notes, audio-recordings of role play presentations, and student questionnaires. Results showed that the students enjoyed the role play activity and did not find it too challenging. The research showed that progression from simple, more guided activities to more advanced, less supported can be an effective approach to teaching a communicative task in a low level classroom.

ACTION RESEARCH ON USING ROLE PLAY ACTIVITY IN AN ADULT ESL LEVEL-ONE CLASS

By

Cliff Huff

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters Arts in English as a Second Language

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

July 2012

Committee:

Patsy Vinogradov, Primary Advisor
Julia Reimer, Secondary Advisor
Lianna Ambriz, Peer Reviewer

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction 1

Communicative Approach 2

Reason for Research 3

Expected Benefits 4

Chapter Overview 4

Chapter Two: Literature Review 6

The Communicative Approach 7

Categories and Sequence of Classroom Activities 11

Definition of Role Play Activity 15

Benefits of Using Role Play 19

Teaches with a Listener in Mind 19

Develops Communicative Competences 20

Teaches Conversational Routines 23

Teaches US Culture 23

Allows Exploring Language in a Safe Way 24

Supporting Highly Challenging Activities 25

Mariani's Theory 26

Scaffolding Defined 26

Case Study on Mariani's Theory 27
Design Scaffolding and Interactional Scaffolding 29
Designed Scaffolding 30
Interactional Scaffolding 31
Supporting Low-level Learners 32
Task Familiarity 33
Recommended Methodologies for Teaching Role Play Activities 34
The Genre of a Telephone Call 38
Research Gap 40
Summary 41
Chapter Three: Methodology 43
Overview of the Chapter 44
Research Paradigm 44
Research Participants 47
Research Site 49
Data Collection 50
Field Notes 51
Audio-recordings 52
Questionnaire 53
Procedure 54
Data Analysis 58
Verification of Data 61

Ethics 62

Conclusion 64

Chapter Four: Results 66

Field Note Results 66

Audio Transcription Results 72

Student Questionnaire Results 77

Discussion 80

Conclusion 83

Chapter Five: Conclusion 85

Discussion 85

Important Teaching Methods and Beliefs 86

Limitations 90

Implications 91

Further Research 92

Conclusion 93

References 95

Appendices 100

Appendix A:Questionnaire on Role Play Activity 100

Appendix B: Full Lesson Plan 103

Appendix C: Rubric for Assessing Role Plays 108

Appendix D: Role Play Transcriptions 110

LISTS OF TABLES

Table 2.1: Four Types of Communicative Competences ----------20

Table 2.2: Controlled Conversational Role Play ----------34

Table 3.1: Information on the Participants ----------49

Table 3.2: Lesson Plan - Activities Simple to More Complex ----------55

Table 4.1: Role Play Scores Per Category ----------72

Table 4.2: Role Play Scores Per Student----------76

Table 4.3: Student Questionnaire Responses----------77

LISTS OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1: Rubric for Role Play ----------60

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, the field of language teaching has moved away from traditional grammar-based methods towards a more communicative method. I first learned of using a communicative method in taking the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) class. The communicative approach includes using activities that simulates language used in real-life situations. During my studies, I volunteered in a level one English as a second language class as a teaching assistant. While in this position, I did not observe many communicative activities. Students in this classroom found communicative activities challenging because they require students to use pre-existing knowledge of vocabulary and grammar which is almost non-existent for level-one students. These students also have trouble understanding how to do tasks, and they may find it difficult to work with partners. As a substitute teacher for this class, I noticed that students struggled with communicative tasks including information gap activities and doing an activity where the student tells situations that make them happy, sad, angry, and worried. I have also had online discussions with other colleagues who are teaching low-level students. They also, struggle with how to do communicative activities with students. I have also seen a couple of text books, such as *Future: English for Results* (Fuchs, Johnson, Lynn & Schoenberg, 2010) and *Linmore's Basic ESL series book 2: Conversation in English*

(Mrowicki & Isserlis,1995) that include role-play activities without giving much discussion on the process for including them in a classroom lesson.

Communicative Approach

I learned in my TEFL class that the communicative approach focuses on use of language to be able to convey meaning. This differs from my own foreign language learning experience of memorized dialogues and drill work that focused on language rules. There was not a lot of practice of speaking beyond the drills. With beginner students, often teachers use drills that focus on learning the rules of grammar (Gibbons, 2009). These teachers adopt a teaching philosophy of the Skill Building Hypothesis (Krashen, 2008). This hypothesis states that to learn a language we learn the rules of the language and explicitly learn vocabulary. Practice is done through repetition and error correction to make the rules and vocabulary automatic. There is a delayed gratification in that we first must learn the rules then at some time off into the future we are capable of learning the language.

The approach I practiced in the TEFL class did not ignore the importance of learning the rules of grammar, but focused on the ultimate goal of language which is communication. A topic was picked, grammar and vocabulary needed was analyzed, and an ultimate communicative task was chosen. During class time, the necessary grammar and vocabulary were introduced, students practiced grammar and were given corrections, and the students used what was taught in a communicative task. This allowed students to use language in a meaningful way and to develop the ability to communicate in English.

Reason for Research

For one class assignment, I audio-recorded teaching a class, to analyze error correction, and types of questions used in the classroom. In the assessment of this assignment with my professor, it was noted that a more communicative activity should have been used for the classroom, such as a role play activity. My initial reaction was that this type of activity is not a possibility for low-level students. I decided to look further into seeing if there is a way that a role play activity could be used to facilitate communicative teaching and learning with low-level students. I reviewed the existing research and other English as a Second Language teaching resources. There are resources that do address using a methodology for doing a role play activity for low-level students (Littlewood, 1990). However, I found no research that described a proven effective method for doing role play activities with low-level students.

In this study I drew upon this research to develop a lesson plan to teach a class that eventually included a role play activity of students calling to make a doctor's appointment. The lesson plan included teaching the skills necessary to do the role play activity. The lessons progressed from simple mechanical activities to more meaningful activities. I assessed whether students were able to independently do the activity and if it was appropriate for the proficiency level of the students. This study is designed to answer the following question: how can instruction be arranged to lead up to low-level / low-literacy students' success with a communicative, meaningful role play task?

Expected Benefits

Through this research I explore a methodology for using a role play activity with low-level students who have little or no education in their first language. I will be able to include this activity as part of my teaching repertoire. It will allow me to conduct my class in a way that is in accordance with my beliefs. My students will get the benefits of having classes taught that allows them to practice the new language in a way that mirrors real life communication. I have also document the method used and results. This will allow other teachers to effectively use role play activities with low-level students.

Chapter Overview

Chapter One states my personal experience that has led me to the research question and expected benefits from doing this research. The students in my ESL classroom find communicative activities difficult.

Chapter Two includes review of the available literature related to the research topic. The literature review expands on my knowledge of the communicative approach that was learned in my TEFL class. It gives special emphasis to the communicative activity of the role play and recommended methodology for having students learn through acting out role plays. Challenging activities like the role play activity offer great potential for learning when the students are supported appropriately by scaffolding. The literature review discusses the many ways of scaffolding for low-level learners. Since the topic of the role play for this research is making a phone call for a doctor’s appointment, the literature review discusses ritual language for making a phone call.

Chapter Three states the methodology for the research. This includes information about my ESL level-one students and their classroom site in a Midwest suburb. This chapter discusses using a survey to get the students opinions on the lesson plan and using a rubric to analyze the role play activity detailed in the chapter. The research data also consists of analysis using audio-recordings and documentation through notes detailing the teacher's perspective.

Chapter Four states the results of the research. From the field notes, it includes excerpts that states observation and significance. The rubric evaluation is presented with a chart per rubric category and a chart that shows total rubric scores. There are also transcribed lines from the audios of the role plays. The questionnaire results are shown with a chart showing the number of yes and no answers per each question. It also includes some of the comments that students included as part of the questionnaire. The chapter ends with five insights learned from the research.

Chapter Five states the conclusions. This includes eight important teaching methods and beliefs. The limitations are noted as to the results being applied to other classes. The discussion points and incites are summarized in the implication section. The chapter ends with suggestions for future research.

`

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This research was conducted to learn how to address the students' needs in my ESL level one class. The students who are participants in the research come to the US for many different reasons including economic hardship and refugee status. Many of the students who are in the class are interested in learning English for essential skills necessary for survival, such as health care, jobs, shopping, and education of their children. Their interest is learning basic interpersonal communication skills. They need to be able to interact with native speakers and produce and understand everyday conversations that allow them to take care of their daily needs. Since the needs of the students are to learn survival skills, the focus of this research is how to use the communicative approach with low-level learners because the students need English practice beyond drill work that will allow them to communicate. The topic was more narrowly focused to the communicative activity of a role play activity with low-level learners. The research question is how can instruction be arranged to lead up to low-level / low-literacy students' success with a communicative, meaningful role play task?

In order to answer the research question, key concepts are discussed in seven sections. First, the communicative approach for teaching English language learners is defined based on Krashen's comprehension hypothesis (Krashen, 2008). Second, the sequence of mechanical, meaningful, and communicative classroom activities are

discussed. Third, the communicative activity of role play is defined. Fourth, the benefits of role play activities include teaching with the listener in mind, developing communicative competences, teaching conversational routines, teaching US culture, and exploring language in a safe way are discussed. Fifth, a theory of using high challenging activities with high student support is explained, and ways of supporting students are listed. Sixth, some recommended methodologies for doing role play activities are discussed. Finally, since the role play in the research relates to the genre of a telephone call, this chapter reports on some of the relevant research that discusses language used in phone calls.

The Communicative Approach

The communicative approach is an effective way of teaching students survival skills. Krashen (1982, 2008) defines the communicative approach as coming from the philosophy of the comprehension hypothesis (Brown, 2007; Krashen, 2008; Parrish, 2004), the focus on message rather than form (Krashen, 1982; Littlewood, 1990) and the use of controlled and communicative activities (Littlewood, 1990). This approach was first introduced in the 1980s. Linguist Stephen Krashen was one of the biggest influences on this approach. He felt the skill building hypothesis approach that believes in using grammar drills was not effective. His “new” approach operated from the philosophy of the comprehension hypothesis. Krashen stresses the importance of students having comprehensible input. This input is best when it is slightly above their ability level of producing language. He refers to this as $i+1$ where i is the language that students can already comprehend. Krashen believes the students ability to speak emerges from

exposure to language and not from being directly taught. Providing a reasonable challenge when students are supported in a low stress environment is something that teachers would find as an effective teaching method (Brown, 2007). Students need to be more than just immersed in the language. They need to be able to understand the language (Parrish, 2004).

The communicative approach is one that moves the learner's language in the classroom to language that would be similar to language in the real world. Krashen's (1987, 2011) acquisition-learning hypothesis looked at how language is mastered in the real world to come up with a second language acquisition theory. In Krashen's learning vs. language acquisition theory, he states that language is developed through a process he called language acquisition which is a subconscious natural process that is similar to a child learning the first language. This unconscious process is having a feeling for the language. Krashen believes language acquisition is not a conscious process of knowing the rule which he labeled as language learning. Language learning is conscious knowledge of a language where students know grammar rules and are able to talk about the rules. This method of learning through error correction of grammar has little effect on the subconscious memory of language rules. However, Krashen's theory of learning through language acquisition instead of conscious language learning has been criticized due to the inability to define the difference between subconscious and conscious (Brown, 2007).

Krashen claims that grammar is learned in an order that is influenced by a natural order of learning. Generally, certain morphemes are learned early in language

development, while others are learned later in language development (Krashen, 1982). For example, according to Krashen (as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2011), the morpheme *-ing* is one of the first grammatical morphemes learned, and the suffix *-s* added to the end of verbs in third person singular is one of the last grammatical morphemes learned. One major factor for students in learning grammar is being at the developmental stage in their language, so that they are ready to learn the morpheme. Krashen (1982) believes that this conscious knowledge of rules only plays a limited role in developing language, and is only useful as a monitor of language. His monitor hypothesis states that a speaker can only monitor the grammatical structure of utterances when there is sufficient time, form focus, and grammar rule knowledge. Learned language may not be automatic, as can be evidenced by people who have studied a language and know the rules but are not fluent speakers of the language (Parrish, 2004).

Brown (2007) has criticized Krashen's acquisition-learning hypothesis in that Krashen looks at it from an either/or position. Brown states that when two opposites exist that there is often a continuum instead of two extremes. In this case, he elaborates that the two extremes are language acquisition and language learning, but both have their place on the continuum of language development. Therefore, language may not be completely developed from unconsciously acquiring language from exposure to language, and language may not be completely developed from learning through knowledge of the rules of grammar. Optimal language development could be a combination of exposure to language and knowledge of the rules of grammar. Research

has shown that teaching grammar can aid in developing communicative competence (Brown, 2007).

In the communicative approach the emphasis is on the intended meaning of language. Krashen (1982) states that there should be a focus on message and not just on language form. He believes this message should be interesting, relevant, and something the learner wants to know about. Littlewood (1990) indicates in his book *Communicative Language Teaching: An Introduction* that people's communication in everyday-life focuses on meaning. He explains that the speaker focuses on a message to communicate and not how to form the message. Littlewood elaborates by saying speaker's focus is not on word choice and how to put the words together for grammatical correctness, and that these choices of structure and vocabulary occur automatically. However, he admits the automaticity of word choice to some degree is determined by the complexity of the message, the speaker's comfort with the situation, and the speaker's proficiency level. He concludes the goal of learning a new language is for the students to reach a language proficiency level so that their attention when speaking is on the message to communicate, and the language form of word choice and sentence structure is automatic.

The general sequence of communicative activities used in the classroom for learning a language is to go from controlled practice to creative language use. Teaching a unit begins with pre-communicative activities that focus on the form of the language. "Through pre-communicative activities, the teacher isolates specific elements of knowledge or skills which compose communicative ability, and provides learners with opportunities to practice them separately" (Littlewood, 1990, p, 85). In other words, this

is training on specific skills, such as vocabulary and grammar that the students will use in later communicative activities. Littlewood indicates the point of practicing specific skills during pre-communicative activities is for language to become automatic. He concedes, it is possible that during pre-communicative activities there may be some attention to meaning, but the focus is on accurately producing the language. This focus on form prepares the way for students to engage in communicative activities. Littlewood indicates in communicative activities, the focus shifts away from producing language with correct form to the focus on language to see if it has meaning, is suitable, and is produced with fluency.

Categories and Sequence of Classroom Activities

There are a wide variety of activities for a teacher to chose from varying in their focus of form and meaning (Paulston, 1970), and varying in suitability for presentation, practice, and production (Parish, 2004). Low-level classes often do not include communicative activities that use language similar to real world language that has purpose and meaning (Parrish, 2004). Paulston (1970) recommends that teachers have the ability to analyze an activity to determine if it is mechanical, meaningful, or communicative. With this understanding, classroom activities can be ordered from simple activities to more complex activities, which can be accomplished by ordering activities in sequence from mechanical, to meaningful, and lastly communicative. In addition to sequencing by activity type, class can be structure and sequenced using the presentation, practice, production (PPP) model (Parrish, 2004). Parish defines the components of the PPP model as: (1) presentation being focused on forms needed for later activities using

stories, dialogues, or some other activity that has a context; (2) practice being highly controlled activities using drills or dialogue repetition, and (3) production being uncontrolled activities that allow students to use the language spontaneously.

Paulston (1970) states classroom activities and exercises can be categorized based on the amount of original communication that they produce and the amount of control of language for form and meaning. Her three categories include mechanical, meaningful, and communicative activities. Paulston recommends using the following order in class: mechanical drills first, meaningful drills second and communicative drills last. Textbooks tend to be structured in this same order (Rubio, Passey, & Campbell, 2004). The literature review will discuss them below in the order of use recommended by Paulson and included in text books.

Paulston and Bruder (1976) recommend using mechanical drills first. They describe mechanical drills as activities that the teacher has complete control over the answer, and the students can practiced without understanding what is being said. They explain in this type of drill there is only one correct answer, and they are practiced with little chance of making a mistake. During mechanical drills, all errors are corrected, so that they start to internalize the language features correctly (Pilleux, 1982). Examples of mechanical activities listed by Paulston and Bruder are repetition drills, substitutions drills, and simple response drills. An example of a mechanical drill is an activity that changes sentences from singular to plural as shown below (Lado, as cited in Wong, 2003).

Teacher: He's a lawyer. → They're lawyers.

Teacher: The class is big.

Student: The classes are big.

Teacher: The student is tall.

Student: The students are tall.

Paulston and Bruder further explain that the drill could be extended to a mechanical testing drill in which students will need to apply knowledge and make a choice. They indicate that these drills are good ways to get feedback on student knowledge, and also allow students to see the structure as part of a larger grammar rule. For example: an activity that teaches contractions for the verb *to be* (Molinsky & Bliss, 2007, p. 91).

Rewrite the sentences

<u>Teacher says</u> <u>Student say</u>

1. We are tall. → <u>We're tall.</u>
2. She is young. → <u>She' young.</u>
3. I am short. → I'm short.

Paulston (1970) advocates mechanical testing drills to be used for teaching grammar, such as adjective noun agreement, verb endings, and question forms. He establishes that mechanical drills have their place in the classroom, but warns against excessive drilling due to these drills eventually becoming boring and possibly resulting in students to dislike language learning. His concern is that it will be hard for students to find the energy for learning and it may become difficult to make the effort for learning a language.

Paulston and Bruder (1976) recommend using meaningful drills next. They describe meaningful drills as having only one correct answer, but there is no control on the form of the answer. The actual language that will be used is not predetermined. They state the teacher has given the answer to the students, but the students will need to understand the meaning of the language being used to do the exercise. They note that since students have been given the answers, the students are not contributing their own ideas to the exercise. Through mechanical and meaningful drills during the practice stage student acquire procedural knowledge, ie the knowledge of how (Dekeyser, as cited in Khatbib & Nikoue, 2012). During meaningful drills, the students are told of the errors with the expectation that they will self correct (Pilleux, 1982). An example of a meaningful drill is a comprehension questions from a story read, such as the teacher asking the question, "What country is Hector from?"

Paulston & Bruder (1976) recommend using communicative drills last. They define communicative activities as ones where students work on speech that is fluent and express their opinions and reality. They further explain that output in communicative activities should resemble real world speech. Paulston and Bruder advocate the view that students should have the opportunity to respond with answers in which they are free to talk about their personal reality and view of the real world. They indicate that students have complete control over the lexical aspect of the language, but there is some control over the structure of the language to be used. This allows the students to practice and learn the structure that was taught by the teacher. Khatib and Nikouee (2012) compared the process of teaching using rule explanation, mechanical practice, and meaningful

practice with the process of teaching with the same type of activities along with the addition of communicative practice, and found that communicative practice caused automaticity. In performing communicative activities, error correction would only be done after the student has completely expressed themselves (Pilleux, 1982). An example of a communicative activity is a guided reply, such as the teacher asking the question, "When you flew from your country to the United States, how long did it take?"

Definition of Role Play Activity

A general definition for role play has been defined by Van Ments (1999) as an activity in which students are asked to view themselves or play another person in a certain context and act out the situation. He suggests that students learn about themselves, other students, and the situation of the role play. Salies (1995) states that role play activities provide students with communicative competence, so that students feel comfortable to interact with people in the outside world. He proposes that role play activities are activities that offer the potential for great learning since they simulate and allow for practice of real world language.

In real world communications, people interact with other people who have a specific relation to one another. In our daily lives, people categorize other people according to roles. Van Ments (1999) discusses the process of how people establish roles. He explains that the speaker receives mass quantities of stimulus that is selectively processed to develop a perception of the listener, and then the speaker labels the listener with a role. He indicates that these roles can be defined by social position, such as roles of teacher and priest; defined by the context of the location of the person, such as a

person in a school classroom as having the role of student; and defined by function, such as people in a hospital as having the role of helping people with their health care, i.e. health care professionals. In the real world people take on various roles throughout the day, and the role that a person assumes does change throughout the day and throughout a person's life (Livingston, 1983). During the day people might assume the role of parents with their children, employees at the work place, customers at a store or restaurant, and patients at the doctor's office. People in their younger years are sons and daughters, and often later in life they assume the role of parents. These assumed roles determine the types of interactions we have. At one time during the day a person may be a supervisor interacting with a colleague making a request, and at another time during the day a person may be interacting with our supervisor agreeing to do a favor that has been requested (Maley & Duff, 1982). One of the roles that beginner level students learn to communicate in is the role of stranger (Di Pietro, 1987).

After roles for the speakers and listener are defined, people assume these roles and act in accordance with these roles. Van Ments (1999) discusses the process people use to assume roles. He indicates that once roles are defined, there become expectations by the speaker on how he or she should act, and how the listener should and will react during an interaction. As people communicate, they have expectations for what are some possible reactions and what would be appropriate behavior. In other words, the speaker anticipates the listener's reaction. Van Ments points out that when people act outside these expectations, this creates confusion, and that this confusion is one of the most common reasons for personal problems developing.

In the real world, the language people use is affected by the roles of the people interacting. The idea of role play is similar to what we do naturally and automatically throughout the day. During the day, the style of language we use is different with different people. Bergmann, Hall, and Ross (2007) discuss that languages can vary in degrees of formality defined as registers. They state that registers have an effect on appropriateness of language. They illustrate this point with the example of an utterance of "Oh, hey. How's it going?" which would be an appropriate greeting for a friend, but too informal for greeting the President of the United States.

Littlewood (1990) states that in a role play activity, students are asked to take on a role as all people do in their daily lives. He explains learners might imagine themselves interacting as themselves in a possible real life situation, or they could be asked to pretend that they are another person acting in a made up context. Students may be asked to take on roles, such as supervisor, employee, store clerk, customer, health professional, and patient. He notes that assuming these roles leads the students to behave as if the situation is real and in the way their character would handle the situation. For example, a student assuming the role of supervisor requires the student to act as a supervisor would act. These roles are within a context of two or more characters interacting which require students to interact with one another, such as one student assuming the role of the supervisor and the other student assuming the role of the employee. This student interaction is in accordance with Vygotsky's social constructivism which believes social interaction is an integral part of the learning process (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Powell and

Kalina define social constructivism as cooperative learning where students not only interact with the teacher but also with other students.

Not only are students asked to take on identities with role play activities, but they are also asked to take on a context for the script. Ishihara and Cohen (2010) state that in some situations speakers need to consider more than the meaning of their words but also the appropriateness of their language. They illustrate by saying that it may be inappropriate to directly ask certain questions and therefore must make innuendoes to see if the person is willing to provide the information being sought. In addition, they state that in other cases a person might have a point to make and need to express it through making hints. They explain that there are cultural rules that determine appropriate language for the various speech acts of apologizing, complaining, making requests, complementing, thanking, refusing things, and refusing invitations. They note that the appropriate language varies from culture to culture. Ishihara and Cohen illustrate with the following example of how appropriateness varies when someone has wronged another person: In the Israeli culture, it would be considered a second error if the person apologizing used language that suggested a way to compensate for the error; however, in the United States, it would be appropriate to suggest a solution to make up for the error.

Van Ments (1999) states a role play differs from that of a trained professional actor. He explains that in a role play, a student only needs to provide sufficient information as to what the character wants and feels, which involves using language appropriately for the characters, setting, and context. In contrast, an actor will go beyond

just using the appropriate language to tell the story by trying to convince others that he or she is the character (Van Ments, 1999).

Benefits of Using Role Play

The role play activity has many benefits which include the use of language similar to real world language (Maley & Duff, 1982; Salies, 1995), the development of communicative competence (Canale, 1983; Johnson & Morrow, 1981; Salies, 1995), the teaching of conversational routines related to survival skills (Donahue & Parsons, 1982; Salies, 1985) the use of language for teaching US culture (Donahue & Parsons, 1982; Livingston 1983; Szanston, 1966) and the practice of language in a safe environment (Magos & Politi, 2008). Due to these benefits, the role play activity is an important activity to use in the language classroom. Even low-level learners would find these benefits important.

Teaches with a Listener in Mind

One benefit of role the play activity is that it teaches with a listener in mind (Maley & Duff, 1982). In a role play activity, a student takes on a role and interacts with another student who takes on a listening role. For classroom instruction that focuses on learning a language, it makes sense to include activities that look at language through the perspectives of roles and the existence of a listener (Salies, 1995). Salies states that in everyday life, the role that a person assumes is determined by the role of the listener. For example, when a person talks to a son or daughter, they are playing the role of the parent, and when they are talking to a coworker or boss, they are playing the role of an employee. Salies notes as people's roles change, so does the language they use

throughout the day. She indicates that since people's roles are determined by the interlocutor, the language people use is also determined by the interlocutor. By creating activities that have students assuming roles and interacting with listeners, the appropriate language to be practiced is being determined. By varying the roles the students play, teachers can vary the language the students practices. By having students assume roles with a listener in mind, a variety of English language is being taught and practiced (Maley & Duff, 1982).

Develops Communicative Competences

A second benefit of the role play activity is that students practice language in conversation and develop communicative competences (Siskin & Spinelli, 1987). Prior to the communicative approach, language instruction focused on grammar and vocabulary and not conversation (Canale, 1983). Now we are concerned with communicative competences that include additional features of language. Language is so much more than vocabulary and grammar, as was discussed by Johnson and Morrow (1981):

> Apart from being grammatical, the utterance must also be appropriate on very many levels at the same time: It must conform to the speaker's aims, to the role relationship between the interactants, to the setting, to the topic, linguistic context, etc. The speaker must also produce his utterance within severe constraints; he does not know in advance what is said to him (and hence what the utterance will be a response to) yet if the conversation is not to flag, he must respond extremely

> quickly. The rapid formulation of utterances which are simultaneously "right" on several levels is central to the (spoken) communicative skills. (p. 11)

Role play activities produce conversations that lead to development of communicative competence. There are four aspects that make up communicative competences (Canale, 1983). See table 2.1 below of the four communicative competences.

Table 2.1

Four Types of Communicative Competences

Competences	Definition
grammatical	Knowing grammar rules and literal meaning of words.
sociolinguistic	Using language appropriately for the situation and the interlocutor.
strategic	Repair language when communication breaks down.
discourse	Relating utterances to other utterances for language cohesion

Canale (1983) defines communicative competences as having four components of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence. The definitions of these competences are discussed below as defined by Canale. The first competence in his theory is grammatical competence which is the same as what was thought of as linguistic competence. He states that this refers to accurately communicating grammar rules and the literal meaning of words, which includes knowledge of vocabulary, accurately forming sentences, and intelligible pronunciation. The second competence in his theory is sociolinguistic competence. He

refers to using language appropriately for the context, for the person being talked to, and for the reason the utterance is being made. One example used by Canale to show inappropriateness was that it would be inappropriate for the context for a waiter to determine the food to be ordered for the customer. An example of inappropriateness for the person would be a waiter who says to a customer, "Yo dude, what are you gonna chow down on?"

Canale (1983) states the third competence in his theory is strategic competence. He states that this refers to having the ability to repair language in the case of communication breakdown, temporary lapse of memory, lack of proficiency in the language, and lack of another competence. Canale discusses one strategic competence is the ability to paraphrase when the correct word is not known or retrievable at the moment. An example used by Canale to define paraphrasing is that if a student does not know how to say *train station*, a student could say *where a person goes to get on the train*. Other strategic competences would be circumlocution, repetition, hesitation, avoidance, and guessing (Brown, 2007).

Canale's (1983) fourth competence in his theory is discourse competence. He states that this refers to relating utterances to other utterances in a conversation, and how utterances fit together for a cohesive message. He elaborates that this cohesion can come from correct usage of pronouns, synonyms, conjunctions, and parallel structures. Canale points out that discourse analysis also includes how to combine sentences to fit the format typically used in a specific genre. He concludes that there are additional skills needed and developed when working at the discourse level versus the sentence level.

Teaches Conversational Routines

A third benefit of the role play activity is that students learn conversational routines (Siskin & Spinelli, 1987). Role play activities allow for students to learn conversational routines related to language that is context-specific, and allow for learning various speech acts: initiating a conversation, being evasive, asking for information, asking for help, talking about ordinary facts, and making introductions (Salies, 1995). Role plays allow for learning appropriateness of language which goes beyond semantic correctness to correct word choice for the situation (Salies, 1995). For example, the phrase "Hold on for just a minute" would be appropriate to interrupt someone temporarily, while the phrase "Stop talking for a minute" would not be (Siskin & Spinelli, 1987). In other words, they both have the same semantic meaning, but the second phrase is inappropriate for the conversational routine. The use of appropriate language for a conversational routine gives language an appearance of fluency even when the language used is not quite right (Siskin & Spinelli, 1987). For beginner students, conversational routines help the student get through survival-type situations (Siskin & Spinelli, 1987). Using these types of routines helps establish that someone is part of the group, and when speakers do not use the correct conversational routine, they are perceived as outsiders (Coulmas, 1979).

Teaches US Culture

A fourth benefit of the role play activity is that they are a good way to teach students about US culture (Donahue & Parsons, 1982). The rules for the roles that people

act out each day are culturally learned (Livingston, 1983). Role play activities can be helpful to students to deal with cultural fatigue (Donahue & Parsons, 1982). Cultural fatigue is defined as "the physical and emotional exhaustion that almost invariably results from the series of minute adjustments" that are made due to different cultural rules in the new country (Szanston, 1966, p. 48). Szanston states that a person who is dealing with cultural fatigue cannot immediately interpret other people's actions and the situation based on existing knowledge. This lack of knowledge causes one to act differently than one would normally act. He further elaborates by saying the person may or may not be aware that they are acting differently due to new cultural rules. However, the success of handling the cultural fatigue or the consciousness of the cultural fatigue does not matter because having to act differently is enough to cause exhaustion. During a role play activity, students can practice and explore the new cultural rules of behavior, and may also identify behavior that would be appropriate in their own culture but not appropriate in the US (Donahue & Parsons, 1982).

Allows Exploring Language in a Safe Way

A fifth benefit of role play activities is that they provide a way of exploring language in a safe way by having students communicate through a character and speaking in a safe environment (Ladousse, 1987; Magos & Politi, 2008). Ladousse (1987) states that role play activity allows students to discuss things through a character that the student plays. He advocates use of role play activities because they provide a safe way for a student to explore roles because the behavior and feelings acted out during the role play

belong to those of the character and are not identified as belonging to the student. Ladousse states that role plays are particularly helpful for students who are shy.

Magos and Politi (2008) state that the students assume these roles in the secure environment of a classroom. They explain that the role play activity allows for students to experiment with language in the safe classroom prior to using it in the real world. Students can try out language and not have to worry about the consequences of being misunderstood or offending the interlocutor. Magos and Politi emphasize the importance of the safe environment because some students have come from countries where they had previously experienced physical and psychological trauma. They advocate the view that it is important for the students to perceive the classroom environment as a place that is supportive for learning, safe to experiment, and acceptable to make mistakes which will creates self confidence in their learning ability and gives them feelings of being respected.

Supporting Highly Challenging Activities

For students to receive these benefits of a role play activity, there will need to be much support for the students. This section discusses Mariani's theory that states it is important for students to be highly challenged and highly supported (Mariani, 1997). His theory is based on previous work on scaffolding, i.e. supporting students' learning (Bruner, 1983). Mariani's theory is further supported by a case study (Ives, 2004). This section discusses general ways of scaffolding tasks for students' learning (Gibbons, 2009; Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). The chapter also discusses additional ways of scaffolding tasks for low-level student by contextualizing lessons with a variety of activities

(Vinogradov, 2008), designing tasks so that students will use familiar vocabulary (Magos & Politi, 2008), having students work together to support each other (Holt, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978), using objects and pictures to define vocabulary (Krashen, 1982), and explaining how to do tasks (Scribner & Cole, 1978).

Mariani's Theory

Mariani (1997) has established a theory that shows most learning takes place when students are being highly challenged and highly supported. He supports his theory by stating in life all people have the needs to be highly challenged, so they learn the skills in order to function in life creating autonomy and control over their life and destiny. Along with the need to be challenged, Mariani states that people need support, so that they have a feeling of belonging, can rely on others when they need help, and have an environment that is safe. He suggests that we match opportunities of learning, which is the challenge, with promotion of skills, which is the support. He recommends challenging students through activities with no predetermined answers, and recommends support through scaffolding. Providing activities that are challenging along with providing support through assistance of a teacher or another more proficient student allows the students to achieve their highest potential (Gibbons, 2009). This allows the student to achieve in the zone of proximal development, which is the increase in learning capability with the help of a native speaker or a more language proficient peer (Vygotsky, 1978).

Scaffolding Defined

Mariani (1997) discussed that support for students should be provided through scaffolding. Psychologist Jerome Bruner (1983), researcher on how children acquire

language, came up with the metaphorical term *scaffolding* which relates teaching to how scaffolding is used in constructing a building. “Like the poles and boards that are used round a building that is being built, painted, or repaired, we build a structure round people who are in the process of learning, and we gradually remove it as we realize they can stand on their own two feet” (Mariani, 1997, p. 7). Bruner defines scaffolding as organizing the class, so that at first there is support by the teacher to correct mistakes, so that later, the support can be gradual reduced as the students become more capable at the skill being taught. Ultimately, support is completely removed at the time the student is capable of being independent (Bruner, 1983). Some ways of providing scaffolding in the classroom are simplified language, teacher modeling, visuals, graphics, cooperative learning, and hands on experience (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003). One way of supporting students is teaching them vocabulary needed for classroom activities (Ives, 2004). Research has shown that students are more involved in role play activities when the vocabulary needed for creating the role play is familiar vocabulary (Magos & Politi, 2008).

Case Study on Mariani’s Theory

In a case study, Ives (2004) further examined Mariani’s theory to see if task type affected students’ ability to support one another. She compared how much success a student had with an information gap activity versus a dictogloss activity. An information gap activity is where students are given incomplete information and needs to ask each other for the missing information. A dictogloss activity is where students work together to summarize information read to the students. In Ives study, a native speaking student

was paired with a low-level Mandarin speaking student to support him. The results of her study showed that the dictogloss activity allowed the native speaker to provide much support since it allowed for cooperative communication. To the contrary, the information gap activity did not allow for the native speaker to provide much support since key information was unknown to the native speaker which prevented this student from guiding the low-level student through the activity. One of Ives' conclusions was that some activity types lend themselves to be highly supportive in pair work, and other activities do not; therefore, students will need more support in pre-task activities. Role play activities are similar to information gap activities since the students are not aware of what is on each other's role cards. And the language that students use, while it might be guided, remains unpredictable. In this sense it closely resembles natural conversation.

The Ives' (2004) case study referred to above also examined obstacles that could prevent students supporting one another to see if these obstacles affected successful completion of a task. One obstacle she observed and discussed was the lack of understanding by the student of how to work thorough the information gap task. The information gap activity involved drawing five kitchen items onto a picture that included kitchen cupboards, counter top, stove, and sink. The kitchen items to be drawn were to be picked from a sheet with seventeen drawings with labels of kitchen items. This student was then to tell another student the location of items drawn to another who was to draw the items onto a picture of a kitchen. The task was modeled to the class as a whole; however, the low-level student did not understand the task. A second obstacle she observed was the lack of vocabulary knowledge needed to do the task. Ives stresses the

importance of "linguistic and cognitive requirements of tasks need to be explicitly identified at the initial planning stages as it is important to know what is being asked of them [students] (Ives, 2004, p.9). A third obstacle she observed was the seating arrangements in the classroom. During the unsuccessful info gap activity, the students were sitting back to back from each other. When this happens, students are unable to see each other's facial and body language. The native speaker tried to communicate how to perform the task, but he had no success. During the successful dictogloss activity, the students were sitting side-by-side. A fourth obstacle she observed was inadequately providing reference material that could be used for support. Five drawings of kitchen items were left on the board for support. Due to the seating arrangements that were chosen by the students, the low-level student's back was to the board and was unable to see the drawings. In conclusion, her study shows that the amount of support and barriers of support in task delivery make a difference on whether a task will be successful or not.

Design Scaffolding and Interactional Scaffolding

Gibbons (2009) also recommends using the model of high challenge \ high support with upper level elementary students and middle school students in teaching academic language and listed ways of providing support to students. Hammond and Gibbons (2005) conducted research that consisted of classroom observation to identify scaffolding and subsequent testing through action research. They defined two types of scaffolding: (1) design scaffolding, which is incorporating scaffolding in to the lesson plan; and (2) interactional scaffolding, which is scaffolding that comes from spontaneous opportunities for including scaffolding in the classroom. Hammond and Gibbons state

that interactional opportunities come into existence because there has been a structure put in place by planned scaffolding. They have identified the following planned and interactional scaffolding techniques.

Designed Scaffolding

1. Teachers can build on students' prior knowledge in second language and students' knowledge in their native language to learn new information. This information comes from the teacher's observation and results of student assessments.
2. Teachers can have defined goals that are communicated to the students, so they understand why things are being done in the classroom.
3. Teachers can order tasks, so that one task builds and leads into the following tasks. The relationship between tasks is more significant than inclusion of a specific task
4. Teachers can structure tasks into whole-class work, group-work, paired-work, or individual work. This allows for responsibilities of learning to be shifted to the students. The teacher's role is then to monitor readiness of students' for doing tasks independently.
5. Teachers can select and design curriculum so classroom material used are amplified and not simplified. Amplification comes from teaching new and challenging language skills in a variety of ways, such as using informal language before jargon language; displaying information through charts, maps, photographs, diagrams, gestures, hands-on activities, audio, video,

internet, and pre-reading materials; and using color-coding paper to identify information given to students, so students can predict type of learning and required demands on them.

6. Teachers often incorporate collaborative activities. As part of these activities, a teacher can include a thinking sheet, comprehension questions, written instructions, or a planning sheet. With these aides, students will be able to work more independently.
7. Teachers can plan opportunities for student talk. Key elements can be continually talked about throughout a unit, which helps with understanding new concepts.

Interactional Scaffolding

1. Listen to learners' intended meaning.
2. Build on learners' prior experience. This includes discussions about out-of school experience and home experience.
3. Reference what had been previously taught in the unit and recap what has been previously just said in a series of related exchanges of talk.
4. Appropriation and recasting of learners' response into more academic language and reuse of students' words, definitions, ideas, and information.
5. Use of initiate, response, and feedback exchange (IRF) for less confident students to get full participation. Engage more proficient and competent students into exchanges longer than the (IRF) by using the response move

to ask for clarification, probe a student's response, or explain a point in more detail.

Supporting Low-level Learners

Vinogradov (2008) makes suggestions for teaching low-literacy learners. One suggestion is that lessons should be contextualized in a way that addresses issues of importance. She recommends doing this by having conversations and listening to students to find out what will be meaningful to them. A second suggestion is that the curriculum can be organized around themes that will relate to students' life experiences because adult students from other cultures bring with them strengths, such as strategies for remembering information without writing things down. A third suggestion is to give students time to learn by using repetition and reviewing previously taught material. She encourages doing this because adult learners with limited education come to this new educational environment with doubts about their abilities to learn, so they need much assurance that they are doing well and making progress. A fourth suggestion is to use a variety of activities, such as project-based learning, the language experience approach, the competency-based approach, and the participatory approach since students with limited education may not excel using traditional western methods and will benefit from many types of ways of learning.

Other education professionals have also provided suggestions for working with low-level learners. Holt (1995) made the following general recommendations for working with low-level learners.

- Use activities that incorporate language students already know.

- Encourage students to share their knowledge and expertise with their classmates.
- Build repetition and redundancy into the class.
- Sequence activities from simple to more challenging. The sequence of order would move from language experience activities to picture words to all-print exercises.

Krashen (1982) also recommends using pictures. He states it is important to use objects and pictures to make language input comprehensible. His reasoning for this is that use of pictures and objects is similar to how parents teach children to talk by discussing things in the here and now, and that this gives children a reference point for figuring out the meaning of the language they are hearing.

Task Familiarity

Scribner and Cole's (1978) research showed that students with limited education may need help understanding how to do typical academic tasks. The school experience provides students with familiarity with frequently used tasks. This was shown through Scribner and Cole's research on Vai students from Liberia. Their study looked at performance on tasks that included sorting and problem-solving tasks for people with varying degrees of education. They compared the performance of Vai people who had attained literacy through attending school, those who had attained literacy outside of a school system, and Vai people who were non-literate. They reported that Vai people who had attended school outperformed the other two groups, and Vai people who had attained literacy outside of school and non-literate people had similar performance. They

concluded that school experience and not literacy was the factor in success of school-type tasks.

Recommended Methodologies for Teaching Role Play Activities

Some recommended methodologies for doing role play activities are discussed in the literature (Eckard & Kearney, 1981; Littlewood, 1990; Livingston, 1983; Luk, 2009; Paulston & Bruder, 1976; Salies, 1995). There is little research that currently exists that shows any one method is effective for doing a role play activity, but there are sources of information that gives recommendations on how to do a role play activity. Eckard and Kearney (1981) recommend appropriately designing the role play activity for the proficiency level of the learners. They state that role play activities can be designed to be one of three types: free, semi-controlled, and controlled. For more advanced students, Eckard and Kearney recommend free communicative tasks that have little structure, and where students are expected to state their opinions and beliefs. For intermediate level students, they recommend semi-controlled communicative task in which students have a number of choices for vocabulary, structure, content, and manner. For beginning level students, they recommend controlled communicative activities which are scripted, leaving only a few choices for the student to make.

Eckard and Kearney (1981) discuss one format of a controlled role play activity where there is a choice between two answers. They show an example of this in a role play activity where one student plays the role of a car salesman and another student the role of a customer. In their role play, the student who plays the sales person selects an utterance from two choices and then the other student who plays the customer has two choices in

which only one makes sense. This process continues until the students have said the entire script. See example below. See table below with first two exchanges (Eckard & Kearney, 1981 p. 21).

Table 2.2

Controlled Conversation Role Play Activity: Students Chooses Between Two Choices

Salesman	Customer
A. Good morning, Can I fix you up with a car today?	A. Take your time I just want to look around.
B. Hi, there I will be with you in a minute.	B. I am looking for a used car That gets good gas mileage

Eckard & Kearny indicate that the difficulty level can be increased by having the students only see the sentences related to their role. They state the increase difficulty is due to the students' need to intently listen to be able to understand what is being said and able to respond with the next correct line. Even though this activity is not highly communicative, it does allow language to be practiced from the perspective of a role and works on comprehension and listening skills. It looks at language from a discourse perspective.

Siskin and Spinelli (1987) discuss a process for teaching scripts of telephone calls that has a three-stage process of teaching gambits with role play being the final stage. Gambits have been defined as "certain predictable, recurring utterances associated with particular conversational moves" (Siskin & Spinelli, 1987, p. 393). Siskin and Spinelli listed in their examples of gambits the phrase of *how are you* and the phrase *I am sorry*

which is used when a person has dialed a wrong number. In the process of teaching gambits, Siskin and Spinelli recommend teaching telephone calls through listening activities. They suggest that students should be given a listening guide with questions they will eventually be asked. In addition to that, they also state that students should be told that the audio will be played twice and that they can write the answers to questions on the second time. In the first stage, they propose that students learn which gambits relate to which function. In this stage of the process, gambits are practiced using drill type activities. One activity they suggest includes asking what would be said for specific situations, e.g., someone called, but you are not able to talk right now. The students would respond with the answer, *"May I call you back*?" A second activity they suggest is having students practice with a partner dialogues using imperative sentence as cues that state gambits. An example might be as follows:

- Student 1: Business identifies itself.
- Student 2: Caller identifies him or her self
- Student 1: Asks caller to wait while another call is received.
- Student 1: Acknowledge the callers inconvenience for being put on hold

The second stage is to completing dialogues with the next appropriate response. For example, the receptionist lines are given and there is a cued response for the other lines that the student needs to fill-in. The third stage is to use the gambits in role plays. The recommended approach just described for teaching conversational routines are to discuss

the functions and the related conversational routine, practice the script of conversational routines, and finally to practice the conversational routines in a role play activity.

Livingston (1983) provides a methodology for teaching role play for beginner-level students. His process discussed includes pre-task activities and the process for doing the role play. He stated the process as having the following steps:

- Introduce vocabulary.
- Teach US culture.
- Expose students to dialogues on role play topic. This allows for exposure to additional language that might be incorporated into the students' own role plays.
- Prepare physical environment.
- Teacher and student model role play activity.
- Students create role plays using role play cards. More elaborate cards are given to less proficient speakers.
- Students present role plays.
- Whole-class discusses the role plays just presented.

Luk (2009) looked at how teachers defined learners' knowledge, and how that affected the pre-task stage of communicative tasks. This is relevant to this research because role play activities fall in the category of a communicative task. Her research did not focus on the communicative tasks of role play, but the communicative task of a debate. Luk discovered that the teacher's view of learner's knowledge often was a view of lexical meanings, pronunciation, and grammar rules, and the teacher taught these language skills prior to the students doing the communicative task. Based on her

observation of the debate activity, she discovered in addition to the skills taught that it would have also been helpful to teach discourse and genre awareness. Additionally, what could have been taught is the discourse and genre awareness of a debate, i.e., stating for or against the debate topic, thesis statement, points of views, and supporting details that are appropriate and adequate.

The Genre of a Telephone Call

Since the role play in the research relates to the genre of a telephone call, this section reports on some of the relevant research that discusses language used in phone calls (Schegloff, as cited in Wong, 2000; Siskin & Spinelli, 1987, Taleghani-Nikazm, 2002; Wong, 2000). Schegloff, as cited in Wong (2000) showed the genre of a phone call has a set pattern in the opening. He explains what is said in the current turn will determine the possible appropriate response on the next turn. Schegloff observed there is a ritualistic opening in a telephone call before the first topic is reached. Both the caller and the answerer need to use the same opening sequence in a phone call to efficiently and without confusion get to the place to initiate the first topic (Schegloff, as cited in Wong, 2000). A business call uses a different format than a personal call (Schegloff, as cited in Wong, 2000). He describes a business call as starting with the phone ringing and the answerer responding with a preemptive identification in which the person self identifies, and then this is followed by the caller responding with a subsequent identification in which the caller states their name. However, he indicates the format for this self-identification depends on the identity and relationship of the callers. Schegloff says that with friends and acquaintances the appropriate response is, *this is (name of person*

calling), and with strangers the appropriate response is, *my name is (the name of the person calling)*. In the case of business calls, he states it would be appropriate to use the response with strangers. However, textbook dialogues often do not follow real world scripts (Wong, 2000). Schegloff notes that once beyond this initial sequence, the first topic of the phone call begins. He also comments on another aspect of the script, which is whether to use the words *hello* or *hi*. He points out there is an appropriateness based on the relationship of the caller and the answerer. In the case of when the caller and answerer know each other, the word *hi* is used, but when the caller and answerer are strangers, the word *hello* is used. Schegloff states that for business calls the word *hello* is appropriate. The script of a making a telephone call would be like the following:

Phone rings.

Answerer: Brooklyn Center Clinic (pre-emptive identification)

Caller: Hello. My name is George Smith. (subsequent identification)

Caller: Begins with the first topic.

The script of a telephone call varies from culture to culture (Taleghani-Nikazm, 2002). For personal calls, the telephone script Americans automatically use includes a *how are you* sequence that is originated by the caller and reciprocated by the answerer (as cited in Wong, Schegloff, 1967). For example, Taleghani-Nikazm observed there is a difference between the telephone script of American callers, Iranian callers, and German callers in the *how are you* sequence of a telephone call. Her research showed that in telephone calls for German callers, Germans often do not have a *how are you* sequence in telephone calls. She observed when the caller does say *how are you,* it is not reciprocated

by the answerer. Her research showed in Iranian phone calls, the *how are you* sequence is more elaborate then the German and the American versions. She observed in Iranian phone calls that after inquiring about how each other is doing, Iranians inquire about how each other's family is doing, and the first topic is not started until after this expanded hello sequence. Taleghani-Nikazm (2002) further found that conversation between people who have a different understanding of telephone opening scripts caused confusion. For example, in conversations between German speakers and Iranian speakers, the questions of how are family members was misinterpreted, and it was heard as being a topic of conversation and not part of the opening ritual scripted of the telephone conversation. He noted that this confusion made for an awkward beginning of a telephone call. Since these conversational routines are culturally defined, it would be helpful to students to explicitly teach students conversational routines of telephone calls.

Research Gap

In this chapter, the literature review discussed the benefits of doing role play activities. Some of this literature also discussed a methodology of doing a role play (Johnson & Morrow 1981; Littlewood 1990; Livingston 1983; Salies, 1995; Siskin & Spinelli, 198). However, there has been no research to show that these methods are effective. Often these studies do not specifically address how to use role plays with low-level students. Littlewood (1990) discusses how to use the communicative approach and makes some comments on how to adjust for low-level learners. Livingston (1983) offers a detailed explanation on how to do a role play with beginner learners. However, neither Littlewood nor Livingston discuss how their methods have been supported with research.

Magos and Politi (2008) conducted research on using a role play activity on sixteen adult immigrants learning Greek as a second language. Students were considered beginner level students, but no information was given as to the actual proficiency level of the students. No information was given on the lesson plan and the preparation of the students for doing the role play. However, the study did find that the proficiency level of the students did make a difference. The more advanced students reported in semi-structured interviews to enjoy the role play activity more than low-level students. The researchers attributed this to the higher level students having more vocabulary knowledge and confidence. Some students resorted to using native language when they lacked the vocabulary in the language being taught. The research also showed that the role play was more effective when vocabulary was previously taught using a textbook, exercise books, or written on the blackboard. Research has shown the importance of preparing students to do a role play, but no specific method has been proven through research to be effective for preparing students to do a role play in a low-literacy, low-level classroom. The current research study builds upon the recommended methods for doing a role play activity and demonstrates whether they are effective in doing a role play activity with low-level learners.

Summary

Chapter Two reviewed the literature related to the research topic of the communicative activity of a role play task. The communicative classroom is a vibrant, noisy place where students are actively engaged in practicing language that will be used in the outside world. As discussed in detail above, role play activities are instructional

tasks that give students meaningful practice in authentic language tasks. The literature review showed that role play activities have the benefits of being close to real world communication, leading to communicative competence, teaching US culture, and teaching conversational routines. Mariani (1997) discussed that highly challenging activities, such as role play activities, will need a high degree of support. This chapter stated ways of scaffolding to support learners. This included scaffolding methods recommended by Gibson (2009) and others who recommended methods to be used with low-level learners.

The next chapter discusses the methodology for this research. This includes information about my ESL level-one students and their classroom site in a Midwest suburb. This chapter discusses using a questionnaire to get the students' opinions and using a rubric to analyze the role play activity detailed in the chapter. The research data also consists of analysis using audio-recordings and documentation through notes detailing the teacher's perspective.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

I have struggled with how to provide meaningful lessons to an ESL level-one class that would promote effective language learning, so I sought to learn more about teaching with the communicative approach to low-level learners. Due to the communicative approach being such a large topic, the focus was narrowed to learning more about using role-play activities with low-level learners. This led to action research on teaching with a role play activity on how to make a telephone call to make a doctor's appointment. This study was designed to answer the following question: how can instruction be arranged to lead up to low-level / low-literacy students' success with a communicative, meaningful role play task?

This research used three data collection methods: field notes, audio-recordings, and questionnaire data. Being the researcher and the teacher, I took notes on my impressions on the effectiveness of the classes. The field notes were used to adjust how the classes were taught and to gain insights on teaching. The presentation of the role plays were audio-recorded and evaluated using a rubric. The students gave their feedback by responding to a questionnaire. From the data referred to above, the researcher explored incorporating a role play task in a low-literacy adult ESL class.

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter discusses the methodology used for the research. The chapter first begins with stating the research paradigm of using a qualitative approach of action research. Second, research participants are discussed. Third, the research site, a community education program in a suburb of a Midwest metropolitan area, is detailed. Fourth, the data collection consisting of field notes of the teacher's impressions, an audio-recording of the role play activity, and a questionnaire filled out by the students are highlighted. Fifth, the procedure used for teaching the students that prepared them for presenting role plays is discussed. Sixth, the section states how each of the three sources of data was used. Seventh, this triangulation by using multiple data methods helped to insure that results have validity. Finally, the chapter discusses the ethics of the research in relation to using human subjects and the dual role of teacher and researcher in action research.

Research Paradigm

This research used the qualitative paradigm and specifically the methodology of action research. Mackey and Gass (2008) describe the qualitative approach as using observational data instead of statistical data. They state this observational data is collected from students in a natural environment, such as a classroom environment, and not in a controlled environment of a laboratory. They note that this observation is generally of a small number of participants who become the focus of the research. McMillan (2004) explains that from this observation, the researcher gathers narrative descriptions that are data in words or pictures, and not a statistical analysis of numbers.

He elaborates that using a detailed approach allows for a total understanding of the research environment and complexity of human behavior of the participant and their interactions. He concludes the outcomes of such observations and rich detail are an understanding of how certain aspects occurred and the reason for the occurrence. Part of this descriptive data in this research study came from the students' perspective. McMillan (2004) discusses student input as each student giving their perspective, which will give the researcher many different opinions of the effectiveness and a rich, complete picture of the same learning experience.

One type of qualitative research is action research. Action research was chosen for this study in order to explore my own class. Macintyre describes action research as the following:

> Action research is an investigation, where as a result of rigorous self-appraisal of current practice, the researcher focuses on a "problem" … , and on the basis of information … plans, implements and evaluates an action then draws conclusions based on the finding. (2000, p. 1)

The research question came from a reflection and assessment about my ability to effectively use the communicative approach with my ESL Classroom. McNiff and Whitehead (2006) state that teachers may find themselves in a living contradiction. They explain that teachers may reflect on their classrooms and find that their classroom experiences, despite their best efforts, do not match their beliefs about education. They state that this may lead to teachers taking actions to find a new way of teaching in their

classrooms. An example for this research study is a belief about using the communicative approach, but struggling to find ways to implement this approach with low-level learners.

McNiff & Whitehead (2006) state the questions asked by people doing action research are different from traditional research questions. They explain in traditional research, the questions are about what other people are doing; however, in action reaction, the question is about what the researcher is doing. They conclude that the question becomes about how the researcher perceives his or her own actions, so the researcher can adapt or change his or her own teachings. This is consistent with the type of questions that I asked. The questions asked include the following: What information is needed to teach to prepare students for doing a role play activity? What materials and activities should be used to lead up to and actually do a role play activity? How can the students be supported in a way that gives them an opportunity to have success with communicative tasks like role play?

In action research, the researcher plays a dual role. Burns (2010) states the teacher becomes the researcher while he or she is also a participant. She explains that action research goes beyond just reflecting on teaching practices and developing hunches, and uses a systematic approach. She clarifies that interpretations are based on solid results and use scientific methods, and that action research uses the typical process of developing a research question, collecting data, analyzing the data, and determining the results. Burns points out that in action research, the researcher is interacting with the participants in a predetermined way to see what the affect will be on the participants. She states that the researcher focuses on how changing an aspect of his or her teaching will affect his or

her class. McNiff and Whitehead (2006) point out that people are unique and no two classes are alike. Therefore, they propose that a question can have more than one answer. Also, they state a solution might work for one class, but may not work for another. Being an active participant in the research study is beneficial because I want to know how my students will react to my teaching of these new methods. This dual role of being a researcher and a participant does have one disadvantage. McNiff and Whitehead (2006) caution that since the teacher has been an active participant in his or her own research, it could lead to the possibility that the researcher may not have been completely objective. However, they emphasize that the researcher has a history of interacting with the students which has given the researcher a good understanding of the students' personalities, their reactions to the teaching methods, and their potential English language capabilities. McNiff and Whitehead conclude that with this knowledge, the researcher will see and understand things that an outside observer will not.

Research Participants

The participants in this study were students in an ESL adult level one class where I teach. The students came from many countries (Liberia, Togo, Mexico, and Vietnam) and speak many different languages (Liberian English, French, Spanish, and Vietnamese). Many of these students had little education in their own countries, and, on average, students have been in the United States for about seven years. The students were placed in this classroom because their score on the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) was 200 or lower. Usually, once both the listening and reading scores are over the score of 200, the students are moved up to the next level. The

students had CASAS listening scores between 183 and 202 and reading scores between 193 and 202. CASAS defines students with scores of 180 to 190 as low beginning ESL, and students with scores of 190 to200 as High Beginning ESL. The descriptions for these two are listed as the following:

> High Beginning ESL
>
> SPL 3 Listening / Speaking: Functions with some difficulty in situations related to immediate needs; may have some simple oral communication ability using basic learned phrases and sentences. Reading / Writing: Reads and writes letters and numbers, and a limited number of basic sight words and simple phrases related to immediate needs. Can write basic personal information on simplified forms. Employability: Can handle routine entry-level jobs that involve only the most basic oral or written communication in English and in which all tasks can be demonstrated.
>
> Low Beginning ESL
>
> SPL 2 Listening / Speaking: Functions in a very limited way in situations related to immediate needs; asks and responds to basic learned phrases spoken slowly and repeated often. Reading / Writing: Recognizes and writes letters and numbers, and reads and understands common sight words. Can write own name and address. Employability: Can handle only routine entry-level jobs that do not require oral or written communication in English and in which all tasks are easily demonstrated. (CASAS, 2012, para.6-7)

Table 3.1 describes the demographic information of the participants.

Table 3.1

Information on the Participants

ID#	Country	Age	Gender	Years in US	Years in School	Reading Scores	Listening Scores
1	Togo	29	F	9	3	195	202
2	Mexico	44	F	11	7	208	191
3	Liberia	55	F	1	1	203	202
4	Vietnamese	49	F	11	5	199	183
5	Dominican Republic	30	F	1	9	202	197
6	Mexico	40	M	16	5	193	183
7	Vietnamese	32	F	1	12	210	191

Note: Reading and listening scores are on the CASAS test.

Table 3.1 shows that the participants in the research were quite diverse. There were seven participants who came from five different countries. The students ranged in age from 29 to 55. About half the students had an education of five years or less. One common demographic was that most of the participants were female. Based on CASAS scores, students had only a little ability for reading and listening in the English language.

Research Site.

The research site is an ESL level-one adult class that is part of a community adult basic education system consisting of a consortium of eight school districts in a

Midwestern suburb. The class is funded by public money and provides services free to the students. The mission is to empower adults to acquire the basic educational skills needed to meet the requirement of their community, family, and personal circumstances. A challenge is to reach all of the 35,000 adults (1990 US census) in the suburban area who are beyond eighteen years old, but without a high school diploma, as well as an estimated 35,000 more who have a diploma but lack functional basic skills.

The class consists of a wide variety of linguistically diverse students who came to the US from many countries. This research was a study on a level-one, beginning adult ESL class. Placement of students was determined by the CASAS and the Basic English Skills Test (BEST). The program has open enrollment. Classes were offered three nights a week, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday for two and a half hours.

Data Collection

Three methods of data collection were chosen to answer the research question. This research question includes how instruction is planned to lead up to doing a role play activity. During the three-week period that data was collected, I taught the skills that were needed by the students to do a role play activity of calling to make a doctor's appointment. Field notes were taken by the researcher after each class to analyze for possible adjustments to teaching methodology and record the researcher's insights. On the last day of the three-week period that data was collected, the students prepared and presented role plays. After doing the role play activity, students had the opportunity to express their opinions and reactions of the role play activity. A questionnaire was answered by students that included questions on enjoyment of the role play, difficulty

level of the role play, and ability to make a doctor's appointment. Also on the last day, the role plays were audio-recorded. These recordings were transcribed and analyzed using a rubric to determine effectiveness of the activity.

Field Notes

The first data collection technique was field notes which were collected during the three weeks of class. Field notes provide the teacher with insightful reflections on the classroom (Burns, 2010). Through repeated observation of students, the teacher can gain a substantial understanding of the participants and their interactions to various types of contexts (Mackey & Gass, 2008). As the researcher, I took this insightful reflection which led to a deeper understanding and adjusted how the class was taught. I recorded my observations and responses after each class. Macintyre (2000) states the data of field notes is a qualitative method of research that is unobtrusive to the students. She describes the method as taking quick notes immediately or as soon as possible of observations and impressions as they occur. An advantage of this method is that a researcher can collect student specific information and detailed information related to specific observations. This detailed type of information allowed me to make adjustments to my teaching methods that made them more effective. Macintyre notes a disadvantage in that it can be subjective due to so much happening in the classroom with only a small portion being recorded. An additional disadvantage is that information needs to be recorded soon after in order for the researcher to accurately recall information. I overcame these disadvantages by recording notes immediately after class and taking enough time to thoroughly reflect on what had happened to get the most important information

documented. Of the many things occurring at one time in the classroom, I paid particular attention to a few key areas. These key areas included:

- What scaffolding methods worked and did not work
- Which students finished activities first and which students finish last
- Students who had trouble understanding tasks
- Students who worked well with other students
- Indicators that students have mastered the lesson material
- The difference between the actual way the lesson was taught and original lesson plan
- Any ideas for improvement in teaching the lesson at a later time

These notes took the form of reflective observation. The notes were written in two columns with the observation on the left side of the page and the significance of it on the right side (Burns, 2010). This gave the perspective from the teacher's point of view.

Audio-recordings

The second data collection technique is audio-recordings. Students' presentations of their role plays were audio-recorded and transcribed. Burns (2010) states that audio-recordings provide a word-for-word account of what a student has said, which is impossible to do through writing. In addition, he explains that audio-recordings allow for documenting large sections of conversation, such as a particular segment of a class. In this research, audio-recording were an effective way of getting a word-for-word account of the entire role play. Macintyre states that audio-recording also captures additional information besides words, such as "spaces in interactions, silences, phatics, speed of

diction, and voice intonation" (Macintyre, 2000 p.63). In the audio-recordings of the role play, this additional information was helpful for assessing the role play for intelligibility, pronunciation, and confidence. Macintyre (2000) points out an advantage to this data collection are that recordings can be listened to many times to be able to get an accurate transcription. However, Burns (2010) states this process of listening many times is a time consuming task. Prior to starting the transcription, in this study, I developed a list of conventions which included who is speaking, inaudible words, guessing on words, unintelligible words, and pauses. This allowed for a more efficient transcription process. Macintyre (2000) states another disadvantage is back ground noise causing it to be hard to understand the audio. Multiple audio-recording devices were used in this study, but only one worked correctly.

Questionnaire

The third data collection technique is questionnaires. Feedback from the students' perspective were collected in a questionnaire (see Appendix A). A questionnaire is a research instrument that allows research participants to express opinions anonymously (Macintyre, 2000). The questionnaire for this research has closed and open-ended questions. Open-ended questions allow for student to state their opinions and feelings in their own words (Macintyre, 2000). For this research, questions were asked to see if the students liked or did not like doing the role play, what was hard and easy about doing the role play, whether anything should have been done differently, and if the students believed that they could make a doctor's appointment if the student or someone they knew was sick. A difficulty with questionnaires is that the researcher is not present to

clarifying questions when the students are responding to the questionnaire (Macintyre, 2000). Participants filling out questionnaires should be given sufficient time to be able to put thoughts and feelings down on paper, and those with limited literacy should be allowed to respond orally (Mackey & Gass, 2008). In this research, to help with understandability, the questionnaires were written in the student's native language, and participants were given the option of writing in their native language, English, or orally communicating in their native language to an interpreter who acted as a scribe. To answer the questionnaire, the students had the assistance of a more advanced speaker to help them. The advanced speakers consisted of a level three student, a volunteer, and two teachers. These speakers were proficient in English and in the student's native language. The questionnaire consisted of four questions that could be answered with the response of yes and no answers with the opportunity to explain their answer. The students often did elaborate on their answers. I suspect the elaboration was the result of having someone to help them answer the questions. I spent some time talking with the more advanced speakers, so they understood the context of the research.

Procedure

The researcher first taught the students the skills necessary to make a telephone call for a doctor's appointment and then had the students present a role play activity. The teachers and students met for three weeks. The class was taught with a process of gradual release of responsibility and planned scaffolding. Mechanical and meaningful activities were used to introduce students to the necessary skills for the role play. For these activities, there was a focus on accuracy. Students were assessed by a multiple

choice test to see if they knew the vocabulary needed for doing the role play. Pre-communicative and communicative activities were used for additional challenges. For these activities, there was a focus on meaning. The full lesson plan for the two week period is shown in the appendices (see Appendix B).

Since low-level learners often struggle with new task types, there was a progression from simple, more guided activities to more advanced, less supported activities that allowed students to manage their language on their own (see table 3.2).

Table 3.2

Lesson Plan - Activities Simple to More Complex

Activities
1) Students practice substitution drill about having an illness
2) Students fill-in three blanks in a written dialogue making a doctor's appointment
3) Students select the next appropriate response to a sentence or two amongst four choices
4) Students write the patient lines in a one-sided dialogue as an all-class activity
5) Students write the receptionist lines in a one-sided dialogue as an all-class activity
6) Students write a complete dialog as an all-class activity
7) Students prepare and present a role play activity in pairs

In this progression from simple to more complex activities, the first activity was a substitution drill for learning ailments that was a simple two sentence substitution drill.

The second activity was a written dialogue in which the students filled in three blanks in the dialogue. The student provided the following key pieces of information: their own name for the patient, the reason for making the appointment, and the time for the appointment. In the third activity, there was a progression to looking at the language at the sentence level instead of single words. For this activity, students read a sentence or two, and then the students selected the next appropriate sentence from four possible choices. To be able to do this activity, the students needed to focus on the meaning of the sentences and which sentence made logical sense to be said next. For the fourth activity, the students began to write dialogues as an all-class activity. The students were given a dialogue that had the receptionist's lines already written, and the students only wrote the patient's lines. In the fifth activity, which is similar to the fourth activity, the students wrote a one-sided dialogue in which the patient's lines were already written, and the students only wrote the receptionist's lines. For the sixth activity, student provided key pieces of information and then wrote a complete dialogue which included both the patient's and the receptionist's lines.

The last task was students preparing and presenting their role plays. Students worked on the role plays in pairs. The teacher paired-up students to work together based on proficiency levels. The first step was that the students filled-out a chart that became the role play card. Johnson and Morrow (1981) state the role play activity involves the students taking on roles to act out which are often defined for the student in a role card. The students were already familiar with the format of the chart that became the role play card because they had seen a similar chart used in previous activities of reading a story

and listening to a dialogue. The reason for having these charts in the previous activity was to get the students familiar with what was used for the role play card in the role play activity. After two students presented their role play, the other students in the class answered the questions of who was sick, what was the problem, and what time was the doctor's appointment. This gave the students a reason for listening and an additional way of participating in the role play presentations.

In the role play of making a doctor's appointment, the receptionist role is the harder role since this is the role that the students are less likely to play in real life. Johnson and Morrow (1981) state that there are always at least two roles in a role play, and often there is one role that is unlikely for the students to find them self assuming in real life. However, the students may interact with another person who will assume that role. An example would be that the students are likely in the real world to be in the role of the customer at the post office, but not likely the role of the postal clerk. Johnson and Morrow caution that the students may not have the language for the unfamiliar role, so that in planning the role play a teacher should anticipate that potential problem. There are a couple of possible solutions to overcome this problem. One possible solution is to have the more advance students play the more difficult role (Littlewood, 1990). A second possible solution is to include more language on the role card for the unfamiliar role (Littlewood, 1990). A third possible solution is for the teacher to take the more difficult unfamiliar role (Paulston & Bruder, 1976). The teacher should take extra caution not to dominate the role play (Al-Arishi, 1994). In this research, more language was included in the chart filled out by the students for the unfamiliar role of the receptionist.

I had the students play the receptionist role. Littlewood (1990) has argued that even though role play requires a student to play an unfamiliar role and one that the student is unlikely to play in real life, it is still beneficial for the student to play the unfamiliar role. He states that student may be asked to play a role such as detective or waiter, but this does not make the language of no value. I feel that if the role is not one the student will assume, it may contain a function of the language that the student would assume in real life in another situation. For example, some functions of the language of a waiter are to inquire what someone else wants and talk about food. These are all functions that students might use in real life. Role plays can provide language that can be transferred to other skills. Looking at it from this perspective, helped me figure out how to prepare the students to play the unfamiliar role. The students are most likely not going to be receptionist in a doctor's office, but they may make appointments to get together with friends and family. I included an activity related to setting a time and date to get together with a friend to teach the speech acts of making invitations and appointments.

Lastly, the students presented their role play to the class. After two students presented their role play, the other students in the class answered the following questions related to the role play: who was sick, what was the problem, and what time was the doctor's appointment. Data on the role play presentations was collected to see if a role play activity was an effective method for teaching low-level students.

Data Analysis

There were three methods of data collection to increase the validity of the data. The methods were field notes, recorded observation, and student questionnaire. Field

notes were typed up, reread, and fleshed out within a day of collection to see if there were ways of scaffolding that had been learned that could be incorporated into the next lesson. To help with teaching using the role play activity, the notes were reviewed to get a sense of the likelihood of success, to anticipate any problems, to come up with possible solutions, and to determine the most effective pairing of students. It is useful to include a couple of the comments made of changes and results (Macintyre, 2000). A list of the lessons learned and insights gained over the three week period that the lessons were taught is included in the results chapter.

Audio-recordings of the role play presentations were transcribed and assessed by a rubric. In creating the rubric, it was necessary to have it be appropriate for low-level learners. For oral language assessment, levels of hopeful achievement of language proficiency can be set using criterion levels (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). Gonzalez Pino (1988, as cited in O'Malley & Pierce, 1996) states that a criterion can be defined in the format of a rubric, and the determination of the features that will be assessed will depend on proficiency level of the students. She elaborates that different features can be weighted by giving different point values to different language features. She proposes one possibility for beginners is to give the highest weight to overall communication, less weight to grammar and vocabulary, and least weight to pronunciation. In this research, the rubric was designed with the idea that the categories of overall communication be weighted higher. The role plays were analyzed for student worked independently, spoke confidently, used grammar correctly, spoke understandably, included all speech acts, and spoke creatively. The students were rated on their ability as being high, medium, and low.

I have defined these categories in the appendices (see Appendix C), and show the rubric in Figure 3.1. In addition to this information, I proposed suggestions on what could have been done differently to make a role play activity a more effective teaching tool.

Rubric for Role Play
Making a Doctor's Appointment by Phone

Student ID # _____

Circle the Score				
categories	None	Low	Medium	High
1. worked independently	0	1	3	5
2. spoke confidently		1	2	3
3. used grammar correctly		0	1	2
4. spoke understandably		0	3	5
		No	Yes	
5. include all speech acts		3	5	
6. spoke creatively		0	1	

Figure 3.1 Rubric for Role Play Assessment

The questionnaire results were presented in a couple of different ways. Closed questions were easily analyzed by counting the answers with the totals being used for incidence figures. This can be followed up with an explanation of how they relate to the research question (Macintyre, 2000). The four questions were answered with a yes or no response. This information was presented in a chart that shows the total of yes answers and the total of no answers.

In three of the questions there was an opportunity for students to state their opinion. These are open questions. Macintyre discusses analyzing open questions as follows:

> The answers to open questions can be harder to analyze because the respondents have had some freedom to choose what they say. But careful reading and comparisons allows categories of response to emerge. … Including extracts of one or two usual and unusual explanations in the text provides 'genuine' material for a lively discussion. (2000, p.94)

This report included some comments of the students to support the comparative analysis and to list new insights. The research examined the responses to see if many students felt the same way for the same reason. The researcher typed up the answers and grouped them per question. One recommended way of analyzing data is to look at the data for commonalities and develop codes. The most common way to analyze data is to analyze a small portion of the data to look for keywords, phrases, and events and use these to generate categories (McMillan, 2004). The researcher looked over the data for frequently used words and ideas and then looked at the data to see if there were other comments that were note worthy.

Verification of Data

Much of this research is qualitative. The data analysis largely relies on the skills and the insight of the researcher. There needs to be a way of strengthening the data and ensure that it is valid. Data has validity when it actually measures what it was intended to

measure (Mackay &, 2008). Action research has validity when it has the following: (Macintyre, 2000)

- Has a well defined research question
- Has a process that is well defined from beginning to end
- Steps have been added to reduce bias and insure reliability
- The conclusions are legitimately derived from the research question, action plan, and data collected.

The first two criteria have been accomplished through much reflection on the researcher question and plan. There has been a review of the literature to help guide this reflective process. The last two criteria were accomplished through triangulation of the data. Burns (2010) state that triangulation is getting information from more than one data collection method. He elaborates that from these multiple sources of data you "compare, contrast, and cross-check" (Burns, 2010, p. 96) to see if the various methods of data indicate the same results. This leads to "more confidence that your reflections and conclusions are supported by the data and not just by your own presuppositions or biases" (Burns, 2010, p. 96). In this research, this triangulation came from collecting data via three different methods: field notes that collect data from the researcher's point of view, a questionnaire that collects data from the students' point of view, and an audio-recording to collect data on the students' role plays.

Ethics

There was great care taken to ensure that there was confidentiality for the participants. There was a random number assigned to each student. The students were

referred to in field notes and identified in the research report by these randomly assigned numbers. Audio transcriptions were verbatim, and students were identified by these assigned random numbers in the transcription.

In this action research, I not only conducted the research but was the teacher of the class. In other words, I was an active participant of the research. Previously, in the research paradigm section of chapter three of this capstone paper, the advantages of and appropriateness of the action research methodology was discussed. However, a disadvantage is that since the teacher has been an active participant in his own research, the dual role leads to the possibility that the researcher may not have been completely objective. This risk of not being objectivity in action research was discussed by Macintyre who stated the following:

> But unless care is taken, . . . [dual role of teacher and researcher] could be weaknesses too. This is because such familiarity can prevent teachers seeing 'clearly', as possibly a stranger would, for teachers in their own classroom are likely to have preconceived assumptions about their children and how they might cope with any innovation, and may have difficulty seeing beyond these! This is a possible source of bias and can distort the research findings. (2000, p. 5)

I was aware of this potential problem, and I took care to look at my teaching critically enough to ensure that it was objective.

Actions were taken to protect the rights of the participants. In accordance with the Hamline's human subject requirements, students were informed of the research and asked if they would consent to participate. This consent was giving to them in writing in their

native language and was explained to them by someone who speaks their native language. For the students who do not read in their native language, a person who speaks in their native language read the form to them. The reason the consent form was provided in their native language is that these students have low proficiency levels in English. To be certain that the students understood what they were being asked to sign, the consent form was in their native language. The consent form stated what was going to be done as part of the research, that participation was voluntary, they could end participation at any time, there was confidentiality, and that it would be published at Hamline University.

The research was part of the community education system. The district of the site where the research was conduct requires approval for research. The researcher submitted information to the committee of Research, Evaluation, and Testing that described the research project. Before starting this research, approval for doing this research was granted.

Conclusion

Chapter Three discussed the methodology of action research on the use of a role play activity with low-level learners. The chapter stated that the students presented a role play of a patient calling a doctor's office who talks with a receptionist to make a doctor's appointment. As part of the action research, the necessary skills needed for the role play were taught over a three week period. The methodology described the three types of data collected. One type was field notes in which I wrote down my impressions. These field notes were used to determine ways to scaffold students, to adjust the teaching method being used, to gain insights to teaching, and assess the likely hood of the role play being

successful. A second type was that the role play activity was audio-recorded and evaluated through a rubric that assessed inclusion of necessary speech acts, worked independently, spoke confidently, used grammatical correctly, spoke understandably, and spoke creatively. A third type was that students evaluated and gave feedback by answering a questionnaire. They wrote their opinion on the following: liked doing the role play, found it easy or hard to do the role play, felt capable of making a doctor's appointment, and believed class should have been taught differently. The closed questions were presented in a chart showing the *yes* and *no* answers. The questionnaire was analyzed for common themes. The ultimate goal was to determine how a role play activities might be used with low-level learners.

In the next chapter, the results are presented. It includes a list of information from the field notes of key things learned, two charts showing the results of the rubric that assess the role play, transcribed dialogue of the role plays, a chart showing results of the questionnaire, and some of the questionnaire comments from the open-ended questions.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This study took place in an adult English as a second language level one class in a suburb of a Midwest metropolitan area. I taught the class over a three week period, teaching the skills needed to call the doctor's office to make a doctor's appointment. During the three week period, field notes were taken to document my observations and insights. During the last class, students participated in the role play. The role plays were audio-recorded and transcribed. Students' evaluations were obtained by having the students fill-out a questionnaire stating their opinions and reactions with the help of interpreters. Through the collection of this data, I sought to determine if low-level students who have very limited English language proficiency and little formal education in their first languages can be taught using a challenging role play task.

Field Note Results

Over a three week period, students were taught the skills and knowledge needed for making a doctor's appointment. During this three week period after each class, I reflected upon the class to see what insights could be gained about teaching. In these notes, there was a focus on how to support the students and lessons learned about teaching. Each note consisted of an observation, and how it was significant to teaching. Included are excerpts from the field notes with additional commentary information. The field notes included relate to the notes that discuss the most significant fourteen observed

insights gained from the action research. From these observations, I have derived insights to teaching that will make me more effective in using role play activities with low-level learners, which is the topic of this research.

1) Observation - I needed to work with student # 1 to help her understand the current task being done in the class, so student # 7 helped student # 3. Also, student # 2 and student # 5 helped student # 6.

   Significance - There is only one teacher in the class, so it is good to have students help one another. I am trying to encourage students to help each other by thanking them when they assist other students.

2) Observation - While students participated in a substitution drill, one Mexican student was explaining how to work through the substitution task to another student. She was talking in Spanish. I gave her a hard time for speaking Spanish instead of English.

   Significance - In retrospect, there may be an appropriate place for the native language. (It may be the most efficient way to communicate classroom instruction.) I may want to consider paring student # 6, the new student to the class, with another Spanish-speaking student during the role play. He has difficulty understanding tasks.

3) Observation - Student # 6 was very nervous about presenting his magazine picture with body parts labeled to the class. I could see his hands shaking.

   Significance - Students' language ability and perception of language ability may affect the students' comfort level in presenting their work in front of the class. (If students have experience speaking in front of the class prior to the role play presentations, this may help them feel more comfortable presenting their role play in front of the class).

4) Observation – I did not finish using all the worksheets and the entire lesson plan prepared, and will need to continue with unfinished parts of the lesson plan the next day or just not ever do those parts of the lesson plan.

   Significance - Having to do part of the lesson the following day (due to not having enough time to teach everything planned) can allow for review (by reintroducing vocabulary and re-explaining grammar at the beginning of the next class).

5) Observation - At the beginning of the class, I reviewed grammar by asking questions and had the students fill-in the blanks in a few examples written on the white board. Most students participated and knew the information.

Significance - Reviewing at the beginning of the class is a good way of assessing students (whether they had learned what was taught). It allows for an additional exposure to the information.

6) Observation - Using previous class material for discovery process to come up with grammar rule was successful.

   Significance - It is good to use previous material taught. It allows for a second exposure to material.

7) Observation - Before doing a fill-in-the-blank activity, I reviewed the grammar rule for the words *he* and *she*. I noticed a student who was not in class the day before wrote the grammar rule in his notebook.

   Significance - Review allows for those who are absent from a class to learn material taught during missed classes.

8) Observation - In the filling-in three blanks of a dialogue activity, the students had to fill-in a blank with an ailment word, such as *headache*. In order for the students to be able to fill-in the ailment, it was helpful to refer the students to the

Foundations (Molinsky & Bliss, 2007) textbook page used to introduce vocabulary of ailments.

Significance - It is good to provide students with a resource to use in case they are not able to do it on their own.

9) Observation - I noticed that a student who often completes class assignments after most of the other students completed a task first due to the student being familiar with the task.

Significance - When lots of time is used for learning a task, there is less time available for learning English.

10) Observation - The class completed comprehension questions as an all-class activity, and then students were able to do comprehension questions on their own.

Significance - Doing activities as an all-class activity first before doing the activity on their own was helpful to the students.

11) Observation - In the select-the-next-appropriate-line activity, the students first completed the activity as an all-class activity, and they were successful. However,

when asked to do the same activity on their own, two students did well and the other students struggled with the activity.

Significance - Something that works as an all-class activity may not be able to be done by all students by themselves.

12) Observation - Students as a class were able to write out both roles (of patient and receptionist in dialogues of making a doctor's appointment).

Significance - Students are ready for the role play. Most students were participating.

13) Observation - Two students showed up after the class had been paired and the role play activity was already in progress. These were two students that I expected that would have trouble doing the role play.

Significance - Success at this level can depend on pairing high and lower level students together.

.

14) Observation -It did take some time for the students to understand that they were only to write lines for their roles. (In the role play activity, I expected that the

students would assume one role and just write either the patient lines or the receptionist lines.)

Significance - If the new task type had been previously scaffolded better, then the students may have been more successful.

This reflective process on my teaching has been very helpful. It has led to observations that contributed to answering the research question of how to incorporate role play activities in lessons for low-level learners. Most of these ideas could also be incorporated when teaching with other communicative activities. These insights will lead to changes, such as encouraging students to help one another, spending more time reviewing material, incorporating student presentations into lessons, and adjusting how I scaffold activities.

Audio Transcription Results

The role plays were recorded, transcribed, and assessed. There were eight students who presented role plays and seven of them were participants of the research. There were four role plays presented and transcribed (see Appendix D). From the transcriptions, the students' role plays were assessed through a rubric. Analyzing the role plays will give direct research data for the research question by looking at the effectiveness of the role plays prepared and presented by my students.

The rubric consisted of six categories that were given different weighted scores. These categories were worked independently, spoke confidently, used grammar correctly,

spoke understandably, included all speech acts, and spoke creatively. The scores are shown per category for each student in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Role Play Scores Per Category

	Student Identification Numbers							
Categories	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
Included All Speech Acts (max 5)	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	4.71
Spoke Understandably (max 5)	5	5	5	5	5	0	5	4.28
Worked Independently (max 5)	5	3	5	0	5	0	5	3.28
Spoke Confidently (max 3)	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	2.00
Used Grammar Correctly (max 2)	1	1	2	2	2	0	2	1.42
Spoke Creatively (max 1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00

In the category of *Included All Speech Acts*, most of the students received the maximum of five points. Students were generally able to include all the information on the role play card for their role. All of them first started with information at the top of the card, and then incorporated a process of including the next information that was on the card. The students used the role play card information from top to bottom. The speech act that did get left out was the speech act of self identification.

In the category of *Spoke Understandably*, all but one student received the maximum points of five. This category measured if students' language was intelligible in the role plays. Even though the language was not perfect, the language was close enough that a listener would understand the student and would be able to help the student

appropriately. I was actually quite surprised by how precise student # 7's language was during her role play. Her language is often heavily accented.

There were a couple of words mispronounced, but it did not affect over all understandability.

Student # 2: Who can I help you? - used the word *who* instead of *how*.

Student # 5: Hi long you have a fever? - pronounced as *hi* instead of as *how*.

In the category of *Worked Independently*, half the students received the maximum score of five points. All students needed some help to get started with the role play. The students were used to the all-class task of writing a complete dialogue of both roles They needed some help to understand they were just writing their own lines of their role. Four students received maximum points of five; after a little initial help, they were able to work on their own. One student had a lot of trouble understanding but eventually figured out the task. Two students needed much help on their role play. These students were able to fill out the role play card, but had others who wrote much of their role play. Students knew the vocabulary of ailments that were taught in class session two. In class session four when the students needed to fill-in three blanks in a dialogue, they needed to use the textbook for reference to choose an ailment word for their dialogue. In class session eight when doing the role play, the students needed no reference material because they had acquired that knowledge of vocabulary of ailments previously taught.

In the category of *Spoke Confidently*, most students received a score of two points out of a possible score of three points. When practicing, the students only read their role plays a couple of times. Because the role plays ended up being read, the intonation was

not natural and the speech contained pauses. In the transcription, (p) shows the pauses. Some examples where speech included pauses are shown:

Student# 1: (p) My (I) I want (p) to make (p) an appointment.

Student # 3: I have a (p) cough.

Student #2: Can (p) you (p) come (p) in (p) Tuesday at 7:00 - little pauses due to the student reading one word at a time

In the category of *Used Grammar Correctly*, half the students received the maximum of two points. There were some grammatical structures that were frequently correct. One was the use of the preposition word *on* with days of the week, and the preposition word *at* with time. Students were able to respond to the phrase *can you come* with the response *Yes, I can*. However, there were some students who had spoken some utterances that were not grammatically correct. All grammatical errors were only a problem once. Nothing occurred as a grammar problem that should be taught at a later date. I have listed some of the utterances that included grammar problems.

Student # 1: I has a a fever. - inappropriate conjugation of the verb to have

Student # 1: For for one days. - used plural instead of singular form for one day

Student # 5: Brooklyn Center Doctor Office - not using possession in the word doctor for Doctor's Office

Student # 1: How long has she - used incorrect pronoun. Student should have used the pronoun *you*.

In the category of *Spoke Creatively*, all students received no points. The previous practice in the all-class activity had a set structure. This structure was reinforced by the

role play card. The role play card was a chart students filled out. The chart prompted for student to fill in name of doctors office, name of sick person, problem, how long sick, and time of appointment. The dialogues ended up being the student playing the receptionist role asking a question in the chart, and the student playing the role of patient answering the questions. They started at the top of the chart and they worked their way down.

The results of total points per student were in the range of 6 points to 20 points as shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Role Play Scores Per Student

students' identification numbers	scores
1	16
2	14
3	19
4	14
5	19
6	6
7	20

All pairs of students had a conversation that was presented to the class. There was a possibility of a maximum score of 21 points. All but one score was in the range of 20 points to 14 points. The scores seemed to fall in three ranges. Three scores were near the maximum with points in the range of 19 points to 20 points. These students scored with maximum points on almost all categories. There were three scores that fell in the middle

range with scores in the range of 14 points to 16 points. These students scored well on many categories. There was one score of 6 points. This was from a student who had been in the class for less than a month.

The overall scores help to answer the research question of the possibility of being successful with a role play activity with low-level learners. Most of the students scored high on the rubric that evaluated the role play activity. This provides research results that show that low-level learners can be successful doing a role play activity. The students did particularly well with including all speech acts and speaking in a way that is understandable.

Student Questionnaire Results

After the role play was completed, the students filled out a questionnaire. The questionnaire asked if the students found the role play activity to be enjoyable, too easy, too hard, and incorrectly taught. The questionnaire also asked if the students believed that they could make a doctor's appointment Results are shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Student Questionnaire Responses

Questions	Yes	No
1) Did you like the role play activity?	7	0
2) Was the role play easy?	6	1
3) Was the role play too hard?	0	6
4) Can you call and make a doctor's appointment?	7	0

The purpose of the questionnaire was to get the students' reactions to using a role play activity in the classroom. By having the students' opinions along with my observations and role play results, I have a more complete picture.

Question one asked if the students enjoyed the role play activity. All the students enjoyed the role play activity for various reasons. Six students thought this was helpful for learning. One student specifically stated that they liked it because they wanted to learn English. A second student liked it because he or she had learned how to make a doctor's call. A third student liked having the interaction with another student. This student seemed to think student interactions were an important part of learning. This student wrote, "Because we are learning and need to talk to each other." A fourth student stated that she had learned how to make a phone call. This student wrote, "I like the dialogue which will enable me to make the phone call and know the right thing to say."

There were other reasons students liked the role play activity. One reason was the student thought the role play activity was fun. This student wrote, "…because I learned and it was fun!" A second reason was that it was important because at home there are no interpreters to help make a call to the doctor's office. A third student liked the fact that it was different. This student wrote, "… because it was a new language learning experience."

The second and third questions asked if the student thought the role play activity was too easy or too hard. Most students found the role play activity was neither too hard nor too easy. One student did not find it easy, but did not find it too hard. This would lead one to think that the student found the role play activity to be challenging. This

student wrote, “At first I didn’t know, but as I am learning, it was not too hard.” One student gave a comment and not a *yes* or *no* answer to the question. From the student’s comment, it is indeterminable whether the student would have answered *yes* or *no*. The comment related to the student’s ability to make a phone call and did not really answer the question that was asked.

The fourth question asked if the students thought that they could call and make a doctor’s appointment. All students thought they could make a doctor’s appointment. Three students expressed concerns that the person at the doctor’s office would speak too fast and be hard to understand. One student stated it was important to be able to call the clinic. Another student thought the class contributed to his or her ability to making the doctor’s appointment. The student wrote, “More or less I could do it [the ability to make a doctor’s appointment]. The way you taught it was good.”

There were two suggestions for improvements to the class. One suggestion was for a typed up dialogue to put by the phone to be available for use in the future if a phone call needed to be made. The other suggestion was for more time for practice in the pair work.

Overall, the students found that the role play activity was a positive experience. The students enjoyed the role play activity and felt that they learned how to make a doctor’s appointment. I had concerns that low-level students would find it hard and be frustrated by the activity. However, most of the students felt that the role play activity was not too hard. They also felt that it was helpful in their learning how to call the doctor’s office to make a doctor’s appointment. The students learned the US culture of

making a doctor's appointment through a role play activity. As noted in the literature review, Donohue and Parsons (1982) indicated teaching US culture as a benefit of role play activities. The questionnaire results provide some evidence towards a positive answer to the research question on whether low-level students can successfully participate in a role play activity. The answers show that the students believe that the role play activity was a success.

Discussion

This research project led to five main insights that will be discussed. These were lessons learned from the data collected. These insights can be used to adjust the process used for doing role plays in the future, which leads to a partial answer of the research question on whether low-level learners can be taught in a way that leads to successful use of a role play activity.

One insight is that students should present information in front of the class prior to presenting the role play activity to become comfortable with speaking in front of the class. Classroom performance has value because it allows students to practice speaking English and presenting themselves to other people in a safe environment. Ultimately, students will need to have the courage to use their English skills in the real world. Classroom performance allows for students to gain some confidence in using their English skills.

I had planned an activity in which students would do a project of finding a picture in a magazine, cutting it out, pasting it on a piece of paper, labeling the body parts, and presenting their project. In my review of the lesson plan, the presentation part of the

project was cut in anticipation of not having enough time to do everything that was planned. The students were enjoying the project of labeling body parts, so I added back the presentation component of the project. During the presentations, I noticed one student whose hands were shaking. I became aware that doing some presentations in front of the class prior to the role play might make the role play presentations a more familiar and comfortable experience. During the three week period, students did two other activities where they presented their work to the class.

A second insight is that there may be an appropriate time for students to use their native language in the classroom. This insight has been supported through research by Condelli, Wrigley, and Yoon (2002) that showed use of the native language can be an effective teaching tool for clarifying concepts, introducing new ideas, and making explanations (as cited in Huerta-Macias & Kephart, 2009) During a class there were two Mexican students who were speaking Spanish during class time. After hearing the Spanish, I told the students they needed to be using English. After walking away, the student continued to tell the other student how to do the task using Spanish. After reflecting upon this, I realized that native language may be the most effective way for communicating classroom instructions. It might be helpful in doing the role play activity to pair a low English proficient student with a higher English proficient student that speaks the same native language. This might be the only way to explain how to do the role play task to the low English proficient student.

A third insight is that planning to do a task sets a long term objective which determines the language skills of vocabulary and grammar that will be needed. With

these goals for the long term task in mind, I looked for opportunities to re-discuss the grammar rules and reuse vocabulary. With review, there is hope that there will be mastery of skills. If key skills related to grammar had not been identified as critical knowledge for the role play, much of the grammar would have been only taught once and I would have moved onto new topics. Review does not only allow for mastery of skills, but also allows for students to be exposed to information taught when a student is absent. Having long term objectives encourages review of material. This insight of continually talking about key elements is a design scaffolding techniques recommended by Hammond and Gibbons (2005). Vinogradov (2008) also recommended reviewing previous materials taught.

A fourth insight is that the strategy of supporting students by doing an all-class activity first, and then having the students doing the activity on their own, does not always work. This was an effective way of scaffolding an activity where the students had to fill-in blanks on a worksheet. However, I did not see it as successful with the activity in which the student needed to pick the next line from four choices. In all-class activities, dominant students may give most of the input and quieter students may not totally understand what is going on in the activity. Calling on students to answer questions might be one way to get more students involved in all-class activities.

A fifth insight is that video can be used to show and explain to students how to do a new task. I used two videos on YouTube from (gavi876, 2010) of students doing a role play of making a doctor’s appointment. When a student had trouble understanding the task, I referred to the video which helped her understand the task at hand. Often students

who have limited education have trouble understanding instructions on how to do classroom activities. By observing students doing the task first, the students may understand the steps needed to be taken to accomplish the task. As stated in the literature review, Hammond and Gibbons (2005) suggest using a variety of materials: including the internet and videos.

Conclusion

I used three sources of data to answer the research question. One source was field notes. The field notes produced five significant insights. The most significant is that students should speak in front of the class, so that they would be comfortable speaking in front of the class during the role play presentations. The second source of data was audio-recordings of the role play. Most pairs were able to produce a role play. However, most students at first needed some help understanding the task. The role plays showed the students had learned some grammar, vocabulary and key phrases previously taught. These written role plays ended up being read instead of spoken. The role plays produced by the students used words and phrases similar to classroom examples of dialogues. There were no sentences that could be considered original. The third source of data was questionnaires answered by the students. The students found the role plays to be a valuable fun activity. The students also found the role play task to be not too easy and not too hard.

In this chapter, I presented the findings from the data collection. I gained five insights that will be discussed. One insight is that presentations in front of the class will make students more comfortable to do role plays in front of the class. A second insight is

that it may be most efficient for students when working together to convey task instructions in the native language. A third insight is that when there are long term goals, key language skills needed for the goal are identified and more likely to be reviewed. A fourth insight is that doing an activity as an all-class activity prior to having students doing it on their own may not always work. A fifth insight is that video can be used to explain task instruction. Further reflection on how these findings might inform classroom practice is found in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In this research project, I attempted to answer the question of how low-level students who have very limited English language proficiency and little formal education in their first languages can be taught using a challenging role play task. I chose to try to answer this question through action research in an ESL level one class. In this ESL level one class, a health unit was taught for three weeks leading up to the day when students would present role plays. One source of data was field notes taken after each class during the three weeks of the research. Two other sources of data were collected on the last day when the role play activity was used. One source of data was questionnaires filled out by the students to get the students perspective, and the other source of data was audio-recordings of the role plays to look at actual performance of the role plays.

Discussion

The previous research in adult language acquisition indicates that role play activities are beneficial for students' language acquisition (Salies, 1995). Based on this study, role play activities can be successfully used with low-level learners students when taught using simple activities to more increasingly complex activities. On the last day of the research, most pairs of students were able to write a role play about making a doctor's appointment. In the role plays, the students were able to use language that would be

similar to real world language, and the students were able to incorporate vocabulary and grammar previously taught in lessons. Improved grammar skills due to explicitly teaching grammar is consistent with Brown's (2007) view that teaching grammar can aid in communicative competence. This is also consistent with Littlewood's recommendation of using pre-communicative activities to teach specific skills need for later communicative activities. Low-level learners are able to do activities that go beyond repetitious drills and move toward language that more closely resembles the language they use in day-to-day life.

Important Teaching Methods and Beliefs

In the lessons leading up to students participating in a role play activity, I learned some important teaching methods and beliefs. These important teaching methods and beliefs have been incorporated into my existing teaching methods and beliefs. The lessons learned may also be useful for colleagues who are teaching low-level learners.

One important teaching method and belief is that the strategy of going from simple activities to more complex activities was an effective teaching method. The lessons started with the students doing activities that were mechanical drills which can be completed without much focus on form. Overtime students were doing activities that were increasingly less controlled. The lessons ended with the students doing a communicative activity of a role play. This is consistent with Bruner's (1983) idea of gradual release of responsibility. He refers to this as scaffolding. The activities used were as follows:

- substitution drills

- fill-in a few blanks in a dialogue
- select-the-next-line activity
- one-sided dialogues as a class
- writing a full dialogue as an all-class activity
- writing role plays in pairs

This is consistent with Hammond and Gibbons (2005) recommended design scaffolding technique of a task building and leading into the following task.

A second important teaching method and belief is that in planning activities for low-level learners, limiting the number of choices that students have to select the correct answer makes that activity more guided, manageable, and successful. Limiting the choices in the select-the-next-line activity might have made it more successful. The activity worked well as an all-class activity, but some students struggled to complete the activity on their own. Students were given four lines to choose from to answers the questions, and may have had an easier time doing the activity if they only had to choose from two possible answers.

A third important teaching method and belief is that further scaffolding would have been helpful prior to students participating in the role play activity. Students initially struggled with how to do the task of the role play. They did not understand that they were to assume just one role and write just the lines for their role. Van Ments (1999) discussed that people assume roles in real world communication. In relation to the role play activity, Littlewood (1990) states that students take on a role. An additional activity was needed before the students participated in a role play activity in order for the students to

understand that they were to assume a role. One possibility would be to split the class and write a role play with half the class writing the receptionist lines and the other half writing the patient lines. This would have the students understand they only need to write the lines of their own role. The students could then practice the role play in pairs. This activity moves the all-class activity even closer to the final activity. It might have helped the student who have good speaking skills, but struggled with how to do the task.

A fourth important teaching method and belief is that expectations for students need to be realistic and defined by improvements and not anticipated outcomes. Success for some students may not be producing an original role play activity. Students with different proficiency levels have different needs from an English as a Second Language class. For some students, it may be enough to give them the role play lines, and have them practice reading the lines. This gives them work on pronunciation. Preparing the students for doing a role play does involve lessons that include a lot of review of material. Low proficient students may also benefit from classes that have a lot of review because it might allow a low-level student to learn some of the vocabulary and grammar that they otherwise might not have learned.

A fifth important teaching method and belief is that a teacher can support struggling students by intentionally pairing them with a more advanced student. A student new to the class whose English proficiency level is quite low really struggled in the role play and needed accommodations. One solution would have been to pair him with a higher proficient student. The plan was to pair this student with a higher level student, but this did not happen due to his late arrival to class. A higher proficient student

might have helped him with his pronunciation that would have allowed him to have some success.

A sixth important teaching method and belief is that activities can be modified to make them more manageable for low proficient student. Another solution for the student who struggled is that I could have given a simpler role play card to the low proficient student. One possibility is to have given the pair of students the receptionist lines and have the students just write the patient lines. Some additional time could have been spent helping the student read the role play. Littlewood (1983) discussed using different role play cards to accommodate different proficiency levels among students.

A seventh important teaching method and belief is that low-level learners will do well when they only need to add a few key pieces of information. The role plays were very similar to each other, and to what was practiced previously in the classroom. That is to be expected in low-level learners' role plays. As discussed by Edward and Kearney, (1981) communicative activities for low-level learners are going to be more controlled and somewhat scripted. Even though the role plays were somewhat scripted, they did allow for the students to create a conversation that was unique and included information that the students contributed.

An eighth important teaching method and belief is that there needs to be a meaningful way for students to practice activity that needs mastery through repetition. Students did not practice their role plays very much, and therefore had to read the role plays. Sometimes the role plays were not very effectively read. One strategy suggested by Carver and Fortinos (1998) is to use the read and look up technique. In using this

technique students read a line, try and remember the line, lift their head up, and then say the line from memory. Under this situation students might be more willing to practice their role plays. This technique was not originally considered to be used because initially I was considering having the students come up with the role play without writing it down, as often is the case when doing role plays.

A ninth important teaching method and belief is that role plays are positively received by students, and that their difficulty may be interpreted differently by the teacher. The students had a positive view of doing the role play activity. They felt that it was fun, important, and liked interacting with other students. The students felt the activity was not too difficult for them. The students perceived the role play activity as helpful in preparing them to be able to make a doctor's appointment over the telephone. The students may have had different expectations than the teacher of what the output should be for the role plays. They may have been fine with just reading the role plays instead of something more conversational. But in order to push students to simulate real-world English, the researcher insisted on performing the dialogues.

Limitations

The findings in this research may not be representative of students in other beginning level English as a Second Language class. This study was done with only seven participants. A larger sample of students would be needed to have the students be representative of all ESL level one class. There may be variables in this class that affected the results that would not be in all English as a Second Language class. One possible variable is diversity of native countries of the students. In this research, the

participants came from five different countries. Results might differ for students who come from only one country or just a few countries. A second possible variable is the education level of the students. The participants in the research vary in educational backgrounds. One student had as little as three years of education while one student had a high school diploma. Results may have differed if all students had no educational background.

Implications

The results of this research support using communicative activities with low-level learners. Teachers who only use mechanical drills and meaningful drill that only focus on form are underestimating the capabilities of a class of beginning level students. They are depriving the student of activities that offer great potential for learning. One communicative activity that should be considered for using with low-level learners is the role play activity.

This research discussed nine important teaching method and beliefs. One, the strategy of going from simple activities to more complex activities was an effective teaching method. A second, planning activities for low-level learners limiting the number of choices that students have to select the correct answer makes that activity more guided, manageable, and successful. A third, further scaffolding that would have been helpful in defining the role play activity, and for students to understand the aspect of role play of taking on a role and being responsible for just one role. A fourth, expectations for students need to be realistic and defined by improvements and not anticipated outcomes. A fifth, a teacher can support struggling students by intentionally

pairing with a more advanced peer. A sixth, activities can be modified to make them more manageable for low proficient student. A seventh, low-level learners will do well with role play activities when they only need to add a few key pieces of information. An eighth, students needs to feel an activity is beneficial before they put effort into repetitive practice that might lead to mastery of a skill. A ninth, role plays are positively received by students, and that their difficulty may be interpreted differently by the teacher.

There are five insights discussed in chapter four. One insight, students should present information in front of the class in order to become comfortable with speaking in front of the class. A second insight, there may be an appropriate time for students to use their native language in the classroom. A third insight, planning to do a task sets a long term objective which determines the language skills of vocabulary and grammar that will be needed to do the task which gets taught and reviewed. A fourth insight, the strategy of supporting students by doing an all-class activity first, and then having the student doing the activity on his or her own does not always work. A fifth insight, video can be used to show and explain to students how to do a new task.

Further Research

This research is a good start for determining if low-level learners could do a role play. I made three suggestions for further research to give more support to using role plays with low-level learners. One suggestion is to research with the same process, but implement the recommendations in the lesson plan. These changes are to adjust the number of choices to pick in the selecting the next appropriate line activity, and adding an additional all-class activity where the class is split and the students take on roles. In

this activity the students would only write the lines for their role and then practice with a partner. A second suggestion is to collect data on the second time the students do a role play activity. Students had trouble with knowing how to do the role play task. The second time the students do a role play activity, the students should already know how to do the task, and can focus on creating their role plays. A third suggestion is to research ways that would encourage students to practice the role play more. This might be the read and look up technique suggested by Carver and Fortinos (1998), or stressing when students talk to people outside the classroom that they do not read, or some other idea to get students to practice.

Conclusion

This research started with a question on using the communicative approach with low-level learners. After researching this question, I believe that low-level learners have the ability to successfully participate in communicative activities, including a role play activities, when appropriately supported. This encourages me to continue to try and use communicative activities with low level learners. Most importantly, I feel that I have found a new way of structuring lessons that will progress from simple, more guided activities to more advanced, less supported activities that allowed students to manage their language on their own. I also feel that I have gained some insights that will allow me to scaffold activities for students that include modifying activities, pairing students, and more effectively creating activities. This research will allow me to use teaching practices that are more in accordance with my beliefs about teaching using the

communicative approach. I will share with other teachers what I have learned by posting the results of my research on the staff only section of the internet site that I volunteer.

REFERENCES

Al-Arishi, A. (1994). Role-play, real-play, surreal-play in the ESOL classroom. *ELT Journal*. *48* (4), 337-346.

Bergmann, A., Hall, K., & Ross, S. (2007). *Language files: Materials for an introduction to language and linguistics*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University.

Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Longman.

.

Bruner, J. (1983). *Child's talk: Learning to use language*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Burns, A. (2010). *Doing action research in English language teaching: A guide for practitioners*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Carver, T. & Fortinos, S. (1998). *A conversation book 1: English in everyday life (3rd ed.).* White Plains, NY: Prentice Hall Regents.

Canale, M. (1983). From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In J Richards & R Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and communication* (pp. 2-27). London: Longman, Inc.

CASAS, (2012). CASAS skill level descriptors for ESL. Retrieved on June 1, 2012, from https://www.casas.org/home/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.showContent& MapID=474

Condelli, L., Wrigley, H., Yoon, K., Aguirre International, S. A., & American Institutes for Research, W. C. (2002). What Works Study for Adult ESL Literacy Students. Study Summary.

Coulmas, F. (1979). On the sociolinguistic relevance of routine formulae. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 3, 239-266.

Di Pietro, R. (1987). *Strategic interaction: Learning language through scenarios*. Cambridge [Cambrigeshire: Oxford University Press.

Donahue, M. & Parsons, A. (1982). The use of role play to overcome cultural fatigue. *TESOL Quarterly, 16* (3), 359-365.

Eckard, R. & Kearny, M. (1981). *Teaching conversational skills in ESL. Language in education: Theory and practice, No. 38.* ERIC Digest. Washington DC. Center for Applied Linguistics (ERIC Document Reproduction Service NO. ED208676)

Fuchs, M., Johnson, L., Lynn, S., & Schoenberg, R. (2010). *Future: English for results*. White Plains, New York: Pearson Education, Inc.

gavi876 (2010, August 6). Can I see a doctor, please? 1 [video] Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oShWcb-bG2g

gavi876 (2010, August 6). Can I see a doctor, please? 2 [video] Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wy8Xdv93-h8

Gibbons, P. (2009). *English learners, academic literacy and thinking: Learning in the challenge zone*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Gonzalez Pino, B. (1988). *Testing second language speaking: Practical approaches to oral testing in large classes.* Paper presented at the Northeast Conference of Teachers of Foreign Languages, New York.

Hammond, J. & Gibbons, P. (2005). Putting scaffolding to work: The contribution of scaffolding in articulating ESL education. *Prospect 20* (1), 6-30.

Huerta-Macias, A. & Kephart, K. (2009). Reflections on native language use in adult ESL classrooms. *Adult Basic Education and Literacy Journal, 3* (2), 87-96.

Holt, G. (1995). Teaching low-level adult ESL learners. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: National Clearing House for ESL Literacy Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service NO. ED 379965)

Ishihara, N. & Cohen, A. (2010). *Teaching and learning pragmatics: Where language and culture meet.* Harlow, UK: Pearson Longman.

Ives, D. (2004). The influence of task design and delivery on linguistic performance. *TESOL in Context*, *14*, 3-9.

Johnson, K. & Morrow, K. (1981). *Communication in the classroom: Applications and methods for a communicative approach*. Essex, England: Longman Group Limited.

Khatib, M. & Nikouee, M. (2012). Planned focus on form: Automatization of procedural knowledge. *RELC Journal*. *43* (2), 187-201.

Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition.* Oxford, England: Pergamon.

Krashen, S. (2008). Language education: Past, present, future. *RELC Journal, 39* (2), 178-187.

Ladousse, G. P. (1987). *Role play*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Littlewood, W. (1990). *Communicative language teaching: An introduction.* New York, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Livingston, C. (1983). *Role play in language learning.* Essex, England: Longman Group Limited.

Lightbown, P. & Spada, N. (2011). *How languages are learned (3rd ed.).* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Luk, J. (2009). Preparing EFL students for communicative task performance: The nature and role of language knowledge. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching, 19*, 67-90.

Macintyre, C. (2000). *The art of action research in the classroom.* London, UK: David Fulton Publishers.

Mackey, A. & Gass, S. (2008). *Second language research: Methodology and design*. New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group

Magos, K. & Politi, F. (2008). The creative second language lesson: The contribution of the role-play technique to the teaching of a second language in immigrant classes. *RELC Journal: A Journal of Language Teaching and Research*. 39, 96-112.

Maley, A. & Duff, A. (1982). *Drama techniques in language learning: A resource book of communication activities for language teachers.* Cambridge [Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press.

Mariani, L. (1997). Teacher support and teacher challenge in promoting learner autonomy. *Perspectives, 23* (2). Retrieved April 30, 2011, from http://www.learningpaths.org/papers/papersupport.htm

McMillian, J. H. (2004). *Educational research: Fundamentals for the consumer.* Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

NcNiff, J. & Whitehead, J. (2006). *All you need to know about action research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Molinsky, S. & Bliss, B. (2007). *Foundations*. White Plains, NY. Pearson Education.

Mrowicki, L. & Isserlis, J. (1995). *Conversations in English: Linmore's basic ESL Series, book 2*. Palentine, IL: Linmore Publishing

O'Malley, J. & Pierce, L. (1996). *Authentic assessment for English language learners: Practical approaches for teachers*. Reeding, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc

Ovando, C., Collier, V., & Combs, M. (2003). *Bilingual & ESL classrooms: Teaching in multicultural contexts*. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill.

Parrish, B. (2004). *Teaching adult ESL: A practical introduction*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill ESL ELT.

Paulston C. (1970). Structural pattern drills: A classification. *Foreign Language Annals, 4* (2), 187-193.

Paulston, C. B. & Bruder, M. N. (1976). *Teaching English as a second language: Techniques and procedures.* Cambridge, MA: Winthrop Publishers.

Pilleux, M. (1982). Correcting without frustrating. *TESL Reporter* 15 (3), 52-56.

Powell, K. & Kalina, C. (2009). Cognitive and social constructivism: Developing tools for an effective classroom. *Education 130* (2), 241-250.

Rubio, F., Passey, A., & Campbell, S. (2004). Grammar in disguise: The hidden agenda of communicative language teaching textbooks. *RaeL: Revista Electronica de Linguistica Aplicada.* 3, 158-176, Retrieved August18, 2012 from http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=1396249

Salies, T. (1995). Teaching language realistically: Role play is the thing. ERIC Digest. (Eric Document Reproductive Service No, ED 424753)

Scribner, S. & Cole, M. (1978). Literacy without schooling: Testing for intellectual effects. *Harvard Educational Review 48* (4), 448-461.

Siskin, H. & Spinelli, E. (1987). Achieving communicative competence through gambits and routines. *Foreign Language Annals, 20* (5), 393-401.

Szanston, D. (1966). Cultural confrontations in the Philippines. In B. Roberts (ed.), *Cultural frontiers in the Peace Corps*: (pp 35-61). Boston, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.

Taleghani-Nikazm, C. (2002). A conversation analytical study of telephone conversation openings between native and nonnative speakers. *Journal of Pragmatics,* 34, 1807-1832.

Van Ments, M. (1999). *The effective use of role-play: Practical techniques for improving learning.* London, England: Kogan Page

Vinogradov, P. (2008). "Maestra! the letters speak."Adult ESL students learning to read for the first time. *Minne / WITESOL, 25*.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wong, J. (2000). "*Applying" conversation analysis in applied linguistics: Evaluating English as a second language textbook dialogues.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, March 14-18, Vancouver, BC Canada.

Wong, W. & VanPatten, B. (2003). The evidence in IN: Drills are OUT. *Foreign Language Annals. 36* (3) 403-23.

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire on Role Play Activity

Student feedback on using a role plays activity to teach making a doctor's appointment.

1) We did a role play activity in class. This was the activity where one student was the receptionist at the doctor's office. The other student was the person calling the doctor's office to make an appointment. Did you like doing the role play activity?

   Why or why not?

2) Was the role play activity easy to do?

3) Was the role play activity too hard?

   Why was it too hard?

4) When we make a doctor's appointment, we tell them what is wrong. We set a time for seeing the doctor. If you or someone in your family or a friend was sick, do you think that you could call and make a doctor's appointment in English?

   If no, what more could I do to help you to be ready to make a Doctor's Appointment

*** Survey was translated into the native language. Students responded in either their native language, in English, or orally communicate to a translator who acted as a scribe.

APPENDIX B

Full Lesson Plan

Table Appendix.1

Full Lesson Plan

	Lesson Plan Activities	How prepares for the role play
Class One	Read words of the days of the week chorally Spell words of the days of the week as a dictation Read story and practice days of the week on a worksheet Teach grammar rule for preposition word *on* used with days of the week Discuss personal information on what days students do things Teach grammar rule for preposition word *at* used with time expressions Practice substitution drill to learn the word *come* Practice preposition words *on* and *at* on a worksheet	Students will learn how to make appointments.
Class Two	Write appointments (Invitations) to friends and family Introduce words for body parts Label body parts on a picture on a worksheet Label body parts on a magazine picture Present magazine pictures	Continuation of students learning how to make appointments. Students learn the vocabulary of body parts.

	Lesson Plan Activities	How prepares for the role play
1/2 Class Three	Introduce words for common ailments Practice substitution drill for ailments Introduce grammar for verbs *have*, *has*, and *had* Fill-in blanks with the word *have* or *has* on a worksheet Discuss personal information of students' prior sickness	Students will learn how to state that they are sick or someone else is sick.
Class Four	Discuss going to the doctor's office in their country Read dialogue on doctor's appointment and fill out Chart Read dialogue of doctor's appointment in pairs Fill-in words on a kloze activity of the Arrange sentences in a sentence scramble Fill-in three blanks in a dialogue and read in pairs Introduce words of family relations Practice words of family relations with a listening exercise Introduce grammar for the words *he* and *she* Practice words of family relations in a pair activity Write personal information of who is part of the students own families	Students will be exposed to the language of making a doctor's appointment through reading a dialogue. There will be activities to notice the language related to making a doctor's appointment. Learn words of family relations.

	Lesson Plan Activities	How prepares for the role play
Class five	Listen to dialogues on making a doctor's appointment and fill out chart Fill-in words on a kloze activity of the Arrange sentences in a sentence scramble Introduce words of family relations Watch video related to the phrase How Long? Define words from the video Practice phrases of answers to the question how long on a worksheet Read additional dialogue on making a doctor's Appointment that has phrase how long. Write answers to comprehension questions on a worksheet Discuss personal information of how long they were sick the last time they were sick	Students will have additional exposure to making a doctor's appointment through a listening exercise. There will be activities to notice the language of making a doctor's appointment. Students will learn the phrase *how long*.
Class Six	Review body parts Assess knowledge of body parts and ailments Complete worksheet on select-the-next-line activity substitution drill on common medicine worksheet for he vs. she and common medicine Students discuss medicine in their country	Assess student knowledge of Vocabulary and learn new Vocabulary on medicine.

	Lesson Plan Activities	How prepares for the role play
Class seven	Write patient lines in a dialogue on making a doctor's appointment Write receptionist lines in a dialogue on making a doctor's appointment Write complete dialogue on making a doctors appointment as an all-class activity Substitution drill on more ailments Medicine Labels Discuss what medicine is in their house	Student Write dialogues as an all-class activity of making a doctor's appointment
1/2 Class Eight	Write dialogue as an all-class activity of making appointment for someone else Prepare role play of making a doctor's appointment in pairs activity Present role plays of making a doctor's appointment	Do Role play

APPENDIX C

Rubric for Assessing Role Plays

1) Students worked independently

High Independence - teacher talk includes encouragement and asking them question to get them thinking and coming up with the answers on their own. (5 points)
Medium Independence - referring them to dialogues read in class or other material used in class. (3 points)
Low Independence - Students are giving the dialogue for the receptionist role and the activity becomes a one sided dialogue instead of a role play, or the teacher gives the students some of the lines for the role play. (1 point)
No Independence - The teacher writes the entire dialogue (no points)

2) Students spoke with confidence

High Confidence - no hesitation and pausing (3 points)
Medium confidence - some hesitation and pausing (2 points)
Low Confidence - lots of hesitation and pausing (1 point)

3) Grammatically Correct

High ability - completely grammatically correct (2 points)
Medium ability - made only one grammatically error (1 point)
Low ability - made more than one grammatical error (no point)

4) Intelligibility

Highly Intelligible - everything pronounced correctly (3 points)
Medium Intelligible - not all pronounced correctly but easily understood (5 point)
Low Intelligible - not easily understood (no point)

5) Students included speech acts discussed in class
(Self identification, stating a problem, making a proposed time, acceptance of a time, closing the conversation)

High Ability - Included all speech acts for the role they are playing (5 points)
Low Ability - Did not include all speech acts for the role they are playing (3 Points)

6) Creativity

Used creativity - added language not used in sample dialogues (1 point)
Copied format - only language that was used in sample dialogues (no point)

APPENDIX D

Role Play Transcriptions

Transcription Key

(p) = pause
(I) = incomplete thought
(IA) = inaudible
(IU) = unintelligible
(g) = guessing
[ ] = other voices
{ } = notes
Italics = not part of conversation

Presentation One

{Receptionist is student # 5 and Patient is student # 1}

Receptionist: Hello. Doc (I) Brooklyn Center Doctor Office.
Patient: (p) My (I) I want (p) to make (p) an appointment.
Receptionist: What is your problem?
Patient: I has a a fever.
Receptionist: Hi long you have a fever?
Patient: For (p) for P) one (p) days.
Receptionist: Can you come on Monday at 9:30?
Patient: Yes, I can.
Receptionist: Bye
Patient: Thank you.

Presentation Two

{Receptionist is student # 2 and Patient is student # 3}

Receptionist: Brooklyn Center (IA) Doctor. Brooklyn Center Office. Brooklyn Center Office.
[student not in role play: (IA) Brooklyn Center Doctor Office]
[someone: SH]
Patient: My Name is {student used her own name}.
Receptionist: Who can I help you?
Patient: I want an appointment.
Receptionist: What is the problem?
Patient: I have a (P) cough.
Receptionist: How long has she (p) she (p) she (g)?
{student who is playing patient tries to help with grammar] patient: been sick?
{student who plays receptionist does not give the student who is playing the patient a chance to respond to the last question}
Receptionist: Can (p) you (p) come (p) in Tuesday at 7:00.

Patient: Yes, I can.
Receptionist: Ok, Thank you. Bye

Presentation Three:

{Receptionist is student # 7}

{only one student in this role play gave consent to be part of the research. Only those

lines of the consenting student are given.}

Receptionist: Hello, Brooklyn Center Doctor's Office
Receptionist: What is the problem?
Receptionist: How long have you had a cold?
Receptionist: Can you come in on Monday at 9:30.
Receptionist: Thank you. Bye.

Presentation Four
{Receptionist is student #4 and Patient is student # 6}

Receptionist: Brooklyn Center Doctors Offices
Patient: What I say (laughs)
Receptionist: what is the problem?
Patient: I want to make an appointment.
Patient: What (IA)
Receptionist: What is the problem?
Patient: I have a cough.
Receptionist: How long (IA) have a stomach?
Patient: Just one day.
Receptionist: (UI) Can do you do come (UI) on Monday at 10:00 ?
Patient: Yes, I can. Thank you.