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# Investigating Role-play Implementation: A Multiple Case Study on Chinese EFL Teachers Using Role-play in Their Secondary Classrooms

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INVESTIGATING ROLE-PLAY IMPLEMENTATION: A MULTIPLE CASE
STUDY ON CHINESE EFL TEACHERS USING ROLE-PLAY IN THEIR
SECONDARY CLASSROOMS

BY

YI LIN

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Faculty of Education and the Joint Ph.D. in Educational Studies
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**ABSTRACT**

This study explored role-play implementation in secondary school EFL classrooms in China with a main research question: How can Chinese EFL teachers make effective use of role-play in their classroom teaching? To explore this question, the author reviewed relevant literature and proposed a theoretical framework for the use of role-play that incorporates three lenses: particular research background in Chinese EFL education context (including a proposed CRCTL approach to meet learner's cultural needs), theoretical ground for positioning role-play in EFL education, and introduction of particular role-play literature (concept, strength and weakness, tutor roles and tasks, previous research studies).

A multiple case study on seven Chinese EFL teachers using role-play in their classes is the overall methodology and data were obtained from individual/focus group interviews, direct classroom observations, and questionnaires. The findings not only reflected the benefits of role-play as a language teaching strategy; the strength of CRCLT in particular cultural contexts, but also responded to a complex question of the needs of teachers and students doing role-play in EFL classrooms in China and to the question of a series of issues that need to be considered in order to meet their needs.

Based on the findings, recommendations to classroom teachers, teacher educators and educational administrators have been made followed by a sample role-play project "Christmas" which integrates various levels of role-play in different EFL classes. Supported by detailed information from classrooms, this study intends to facilitate more in-depth discussions from researchers and

practitioners regarding role-play implementation in EFL classrooms. This study is

expected not only to be helpful for EFL teachers and students in China but also

for those in other countries.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this last paragraph to my family in China, especially my father Zheng Lin, mother Xiaoping Wang and grandmother (mother's mother) Jianming Dong. Without their generous support both mentally and financially, this work will never be accomplished. Also, I would like to dedicate this study to my grandfather (mother's father), Xiang Wang, and grandfather (father's father) Jinliang Lin who had passed away but impressed and influenced me all along with their endless love and spirit. Special thanks also go to all my friends and relatives in China and Canada including Jin Yu, Kai Lian, and Liping Ding for unwavering support and patience during my study in Canada. To them, I owe too much.

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# CHAPTER ONE:   INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

## The Opening

In China, as the goal of language education recently has shifted from teaching linguistic competence to communicative competence, the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) has gained attention and teachers are being encouraged to use extended activities such as role-plays or simulation games for CLT (Rao, 1996). Some schools and universities now require teachers to integrate role-play activities into their teaching on a regular basis as numerous researchers (e.g. Kaur, 2002; Kodotchigova, 2001; Makita, 1995; Tompkins, 1998; Salies, 1995; Sato, 2001) have agreed upon the effectiveness of role-play in language acquisition process and believe that "role-play needs to be widely rooted, as the benefits are aplenty" (Kaur, 2002, p.2). As a Chinese EFL teacher used to work in one such school, I have a long association with using this approach and so decided to research the area in depth. However, as an introduction to how I came to do this research I would like to present my personal narrative to show how my thinking on the use of role play has evolved. Drake's "Story Model" (1996) provides a suitable framework for me to furnish this background.

Drake (1996) asserted that we construct knowledge and make meaning of it through the lens of our personal stories, cultural backgrounds, the global filters and human communality and thus she put forward the "Story Model" which contains personal, cultural, global and universal dimensions. Drake (1992) believes the model is an effective means of promoting understating of what happened and the changing shifts in the educational world. I chose this model as it

was both interesting and effective to reflect my research process in that "storytelling promotes integration of thoughts, ideas and feelings through the understating of what matters to the others" (Castle, 1995, p.1). I am confident that by sharing my own story in various dimensions, the readers can have a fuller and richer understanding of my research journey.

The following chart is included as background information for the "Story Model."
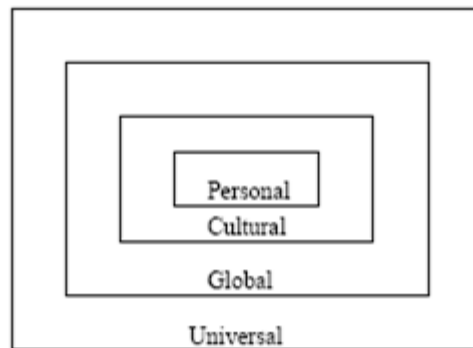


*Fig.1: Simplified Version of Drake's Story Model*

It is worth mentioning that I only apply the first three dimensions (personal, cultural, global) to narrate my research journey as I have found too many overlaps between the global and universal dimensions. I believe a flexible application of such a model is plausible and necessary to introduce my individual research process.

**1.0 Introduction**

*When you set out for Ithaca*
*Ask that the way be long*
*Full of adventure, full of instruction. (Ithaca, Cavafy, 1911)*

Looking back to the efforts and struggles I have accomplished to find my research focus (the use of role-play in EFL education), I realize that I have taken a long journey, which, as the poem Ithaca illustrates, is a journey full of adventures and instructions during which my previous beliefs have been deeply shaken as new problems emerged.

To narrate this personal odyssey, I would like to employ the "Story Model" (Drake, 1992) which I believe will enable me to provide a richer context and a fuller understanding for my research process by including the past-present-future and the personal, cultural and global stories. For me, the process that I have gone through to find my research topic and decide the research questions is like a journey to Ithaca and there have been three main stages which are illustrated by the following picture.



*Fig.2: My Research Process*

In this chapter, I will reflect on the process of exploring my research focus by reviewing my educational and professional experience as well as related research studies embedded in the story model. I will also provide brief introduction of my research at the end of the chapter.

## 1.1 Old Story: Coming to the Research

### *1.1.1 Old Story*

I remember my first year of teaching very well. In 2001, I had my teaching practicum and taught Grade 9 students in a common public school in China. That year was one of the most difficult years of my career because I found the students were bored with standardized textbooks and lectures, and some of them had already become "mute" English learners who would never communicate. As a new practicing EFL teacher, I was anxious to change the situation but I realized that my pre-service training was not sufficient and despite the different ways I tried, the students achieved little progress.

One day in December 2001, it happened that I was too sick to give a regular lecture, so I had my students retell a fable they learnt the day before in small groups when suddenly a student asked me whether his group could make some changes to the fable. I was surprised, yet happily agreed. Amazingly, most groups changed the story by adding exciting plots, and automatically, they selected and performed different roles in the fable and acted them out. I was fascinated by their outstanding performance, and later on, I tried my best to offer them chances to use this activity which I found greatly motivated them to enhance their oral skills as well as grammatical knowledge.

After graduation, I taught at a special foreign language school, where teachers used Western content based textbooks that require teachers to conduct the activity that I used during my practicum once a week. This activity is labeled "role-play" in the book and it is since then that I have learnt the exact term "role-play" and continued to experience its effectiveness in improving my

students' communicative competence. Nonetheless, I also encountered problems in class which I felt were hard to deal with. I felt the need to know the related theories of this technique in order to improve my teaching. Hence, I reviewed relevant role-playing literature and found little consensus on the terms used in the role playing literature. To some (Bambrough, 1994; Van Ments, 1990), it falls under the wide umbrella set of simulation and language games while to the others (e.g. Jones, 1982) role-play should have a wider range from highly controlled guided conversations to dramatic activities. Most notions given are confusing and controversial, and few deal with role-play in the language education field in particular. Therefore, I realized the importance to redefine what is meant by role-play in EFL education from a broader perspective so that language instructors can approach it in a systematic way. Among all the previous notions of role-play in language classes, I am in favor of Ladousse's (1987) definition which regards role-play as "an educational technique, known to generate a lot of fun, excitement, joy and laughter in the language class as 'play' itself guarantees a safe environment in which learners can be as inventive and playful as possible" (reviewed by Kaur, 2002, p. 60). Ladousse's definition points out the essence of role-play and lays a firm educational basis for it.

With regard to the potential problems with role-play implementation, I found the most thorough studies on this aspect were made by Sato (2001) who addressed practical problems with using role-play and summarized them into six different categories: the lack of classroom space, cost of a lot of classroom time, students' play acting, chaos in the classroom, the lack of grammar work and lack of enough opportunity to participate. He attempts to present a series of solutions

most of which I found effective in my role-play practice. However, there were still some problems that my colleagues and I encountered in our Chinese EFL classes that have not been addressed as few studies examined role-play implementation in EFL classrooms in China. I then began to feel the need to promote discussion and communication among teachers using role-play to better understand this method and make effective use of it to deal with the problems. As a result, I initially set my research focus as the use of role-play in EFL education.

### 1.1.2 Cultural Context of the Old Story

As an EFL teacher working in a foreign language schools where language teachers use Western content based materials and experimental ways to teach foreign languages, I have the opportunity to use role-play and enjoy its benefits in EFL teaching. Nevertheless, it is a pity that the application of role-play is limited to special key schools and it still remains new to most common public schools where the teachers have to follow the basal text teaching procedures，using

test-oriented textbooks and rigid drills for the texts with their students. It is hard to change the situation as our educational system has been greatly influenced by the ontological and epistemological beliefs of Confucius, who advocated that knowledge is not attained by creating new things, but by studying the classics and making it our own. Thus, it is no wonder that most school teach English with the grammar-translation approach that was based on grammar rules and bilingual lists of vocabulary where the learners learn grammar deductively by means of long and elaborate explanations (Chastain, 1976). As a result, English teaching in China has been synonymous with textbooks, lectures, blackboards and chalk, and

many Chinese students have become "deaf" And "dumb" English learners who seldom engage in real communication. Considering this situation, I feel a great responsibility to share my experience with using role-play to teachers in common public schools and provide them some introduction and instruction so that they can start their own role-play journey.

### 1.1.3 Global Context of the Old Story

While role-play is a new term in China, in the other parts of the world, especially Western countries, the value of role-play in language and literacy education has been widely recognized (Tompkins, 1998). In recent years, language teaching has focused on the learning process rather than the teaching of the language and the emphasis has moved from the linguistic competence of the language learners to the development of their communicative competence (Maxwell, 1997). The communicative language teaching approach (CLT) has become the dominant approach in many countries. Numerous researchers agree that role-play is vital in developing the communicative ability of the learners, especially oral proficiency (Kaur, 2002; Maxwell, 1997; Sato, 2001; Tompkins, 1998). However, based on my professional experience and review of the previous studies, I found that most of the existing arguments for its effectiveness are not found in the EFL education field and they appear to give a set of discrete items, which may lead to confusion and frustration of role-play practitioners (Lin, 2006). Besides, both teachers' and students' concerns for using this technique have not received enough attention and little literature has documented the method from the teachers' perspective. Therefore, I decided to explore my research focus from the EFL teachers' perspective, which I believe may provide more detailed

information about role-play implementation as well as introduction and guidelines of this teaching method for EFL instructors.

### *1.1.4 Summary of the Old Story*

By exploring the personal, cultural and global dimensions of the old story, I traced the process of how I found "my path with heart," namely; how Chinese EFL teachers can apply role-play more effectively in real classrooms. After setting my research focus, I started to explore my specific research questions and sought a theoretical framework for my study. In a later section, the present story, I will focus on the process of how I refined my theoretical framework and research questions.

## 1.2. Present Story: Refining the Theoretical Framework and Research Questions

The Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) is an important teaching approach behind the use of role-play and other extended activities to teach EFL (Richard & Rodgers, 1986). For the teachers using role-play and other extended activities in class, it is necessary to have a brief overview of the development of this approach and the special factors that constrain its application, which may help them to design their classes to ensure the effective application of CLT. Therefore, I included a review of CLT with a focus on the notion of communicative competence, the central tenet of CLT as the most important part in my literature review because the goal of role-play is to promote communicative competence. Canale and Swain (1980) divided it into four areas of knowledge and skills including (1) grammatical competence: the ability of correct use of phonology, syntax, vocabulary and semantics correctly; (2) socio-linguistic competence: the competence concerned with the appropriateness of

communication depending on the context including the participants and the rules

for interaction; (3) discourse competence: cohesion and coherence of utterances in

a discourse and (4) strategic competence: the set of strategies that are put into use

when communication fails. As role-play is one of the major categories of CLT

(Richard & Rodgers, 1986), it can be used to promote the four kinds of

competence mentioned above. However, I now began to question the notion of

communicative competence and the limits of the CLT, and I began to wonder if

role-play could be used to compensate these limits of CLT. I will explore the

development of my thoughts on this notion through the dimensions of personal,

cultural and global perspectives.

### *1.2.1 Present Personal Story*

Although I have been interested in role-play in EFL education for a long

time, I haven't had the opportunity to explore the topic more thoroughly. Even

though I did related research for my master's thesis, due to time and sample limit,

many aspects were left uncovered in the field. Moreover, I felt that the theoretical

groundings guiding my research interest needed expansion.

In preparation for this research, I focused on the social-cultural stream of

curriculum, which offered me an opportunity to reflect on my previous teaching

experience in various literary forms and the following picture is one of the forms I

used to reflect on a role-play class.

*Fig.3: My "Christmas" class*

The picture was about a Christmas class in 2001, in which I prepared a variety of materials for that class to introduce Christmas and its related vocabulary and customs. I used role-play to help my students to communicate appropriately in different assigned roles in the Christmas scenario. Most students were excited; however, my implementation of role-play did not interest Chun, a girl who had just transferred into my class from a small town. She was reluctant to participate as usual. The following is taken from the drama, one of the literary forms I composed to describe what happened in that class:

> *Time passed and Chun concentrated less and less. She looked out of the window and gazed at the snowflakes falling from the sky. Scenes of celebrations for the Spring Festival in her hometown began to come into her mind. Chun talked to herself: Christmas seems interesting, but I also love Spring Festival. It is not as boring as Ming says. Why don't they introduce our Chinese festival in class?*

While composing this monologue, it occurred to me that Chun would be more motivated if she had been asked to do a role-play about the Spring Festival in English. During my three years of teaching, I came across at least four students

like Chun. They all came from small towns and their parents spent considerable amount of money to transfer them into our school to improve their English and to broaden their views. I spared no effort to have them learn from the others by asking the role model students to help and forcing these students to participate in the role-play in class. It turned out that later; those students became accustomed to role-playing activities and behaved like their peers. I do not doubt that it was the power of role-play for the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) that helped them to improve their English and immerse themselves into the Western culture. Nevertheless, as I reviewed this experience again in light of taking the social-cultural stream of curriculum that I was studying and read the works composed by Manning (2003) and Pinar et al. (1995), my belief in the CLT had been shaken as I found it did not solve any problems of the cultural conflict; I suspected that my adoption of it had unconsciously produced "cultural imperialism" into my class (Anderson, 1993; Ellis, 1996; Rao, 2002; Sano et. al., 1984). I realize that language education is never neutral as "it always leaves a residue we can not control and such is the paradox of language: it is used both to imprison and colonize a people and to set them free" (Manning, 2003, p.133). I was greatly impressed by such a claim and I now I was confining Chun (and indeed the other students as well) by trying to infuse her with Western culture without concern for our own culture. I even wonder whether I have imprisoned myself and become lost in Western culture. Consequently, I included another element in my research which is the possibility of using role-play to promote intercultural awareness.

*1.2.2 Present Story in the Cultural Context*

Considering the updated research focus and purpose, I felt it was necessary to review the use of role-play for communicative language teaching in China in order to present a background of my study. I then did a review and synthesis of related literature which revealed that in China, the goal of language teaching is shifting from linguistic competence to communicative competence and CLT has been adopted as a useful EFL teaching approach (Huang & Xu, 2003). I also noticed that CLT is still in its infancy and teachers need a deeper understanding of the approach (Davies & Pearse, 2000). As a Chinese EFL teacher working in a famous foreign languages school where role-play is required to be used as a CLT approach, I have experienced the effectiveness of it by urging the students to use the target language in real-life like situations. I have also encountered problems with its implementation within our own cultural context. As the textbooks we use for CLT are mostly Western context based, quite a few students have experienced cultural conflict or confusion and our native culture and values seem to be marginalized. However, most of my colleagues are still very positive about the CLT with little concern that it may cause domination over our native language and culture. Therefore, it is necessary to direct their attention to the limitations of the CLT and encourage the innovations on role-play implementation to promote other competence besides Canale and Swain's (1980) four aspects of communicative competence. Therefore, I am more confident that my study on Chinese EFL teachers' role-play implementation will help to generate a greater understanding of the benefits and limitations of CLT and

provide information on one of the teaching methods that Chinese EFL teachers can use to teach language communicatively and culture-responsively.

### 1.2.3 Present Story in the Global Context

While the CLT has been currently adopted and popularized in EFL education in Asia, numerous researchers in the world have identified problems of implementing the approach within a specific context and raised such issues as "cultural appropriateness for Asian learners" (Anderson, 1993; Ellis, 1996; Rao, 2002; Sano et. al., 1984) and "linguistic and cultural imperialism" (Qiang & Wolff, 2005). My personal story is a good example of the cultural conflict of Chinese EFL teachers and students which the CLT failed to solve. In order to find possibilities to solve the problems of culture conflict and imperialism, I turned to the relevant literature and learnt the notion of the Culturally-responsive Approach (CRA). CRA is an approach that recognizes the importance of students' cultural references. As is agreed by a number of researchers (e.g. Gay, 2000;Ladson-Billings, 1994), it can help to address the cultural diversity of children and alleviate the problems caused by cultural conflict. I wonder if EFL teachers can use role-play for both CLT and CRA. Interestingly, although CRA is not a new idea, most literature on it is limited to an abstract theoretical framework of it and most studies focused on literacy education in a multi-cultural society, and few studies have been done in the EFL education field in particular. For EFL teachers using role-play within a specific cultural context, such as Chinese EFL teachers, there should be more sufficient information to guide their practice. Hence, I felt the need to examine CRA further and include it into my literature review.

While the benefits of role-play in EFL education has just been recognized in China, researchers in other parts of the world have already started to explore its limitations and problems with using it. According to Kaur, "In spite of its centrality in communicative language teaching and learning, role-play has somewhat lost its role and declined in prominence due to the lack of resourcefulness and innovations on the part of some teachers" (2002, p. 60). Although I do not agree that teachers should take full responsibilities for the problem, I do agree that it is important for teachers to have sufficient theoretical and practical knowledge of this technique in order to improve their classroom performance. Thus, my study intends to offer EFL teachers with limited experience and knowledge pedagogical support in their role-play practice; to initiate a further discussion on the use of role-play as an EFL instruction technique and to promote more comprehensive and further studies in the field.

With these concerns in mind, I formulated my research question: How can Chinese EFL teachers improve their use of role-play to both address students' language and cultural needs? By exploring this research question, I hope to present a window onto the understanding of incorporating role-play as a teaching technique in EFL classrooms in a special cultural context and thereby shed new light on the existing research.

### 1.2.4 Summary

Through examining the personal, cultural and global dimensions of the present story, I traced the process of how I came to my specific research question and tried to establish a theoretical grounding for my study. Like a heroine heading for Ithaca, I feel that I am one more step closer to my destination.

**1.3. New Story: The Review of the Research**

*1.3.1 Review of my Research Process*

As I traced the development of my research focus and research questions by exploring the personal, cultural and global stories, I realized that completing such a research project is a long and challenging process just like the journey to Ithaca. However, with a clear research focus and more comprehensive theoretical grounding, I am well-prepared to venture into my future research. In this new story section, I would like to review my research development as well as important aspects of my dissertation as a summary of the outcomes of my doctoral program and predict the new stories.

At the beginning of the PhD program, I had decided on my research focus and I chose my stream as the social cultural context of language education. However, I did not actually understand what the social cultural context meant, nor did I consider embedding the social cultural dimension into my research on role-play. Later in the program, I took the social cultural context of curriculum course and realized the importance of "social culture context" and "cultural awareness" (Byram & Fleming, 1998, p.12). To present a social cultural context of my research, I did a review and synthesis of the literature related to cultural dimensions of language education and found references to a more expanded communicative competence which includes intercultural communicative competence. According to my review, as more and more studies have identified problems with implementing CLT in specific cultural context, a number of researchers (e.g., Hymes,1980; Byram & Fleming 1998; Nunn, 2005) realized that the essence of Canale and Swain's (1980) communicative competence only

involves an understanding of the norms of social interaction of one socio-cultural community and based on their work, the conception of communicative competence has been expanded in recent years to include intercultural communicative competence (see Byram,1991; Kramsch, 1993 as reviewed by Baker, 2003). Intercultural communicative competence entails an understanding of the differences in interactional norms between different speech communities and an ability to "reconcile or mediate between different modes present" (Byram & Fleming, 1998, p.12). Central to the notion of intercultural communicative competence is "cultural awareness" which involves an understanding not only of the culture of the language being studied but also the learners' own culture. If, as Baker (2003) emphasized, such "cultural awareness should be viewed as an intrinsic part of language learning and without it successful communication may be impossible" (p.3), then role-play should be used not only to teach the culture of the target language, but also to address the culture of the learners. At this point, my future plan is to become a culturally responsive teacher and researcher to improve the use of role-play for EFL/ESL education. As a result, in my current study, I have extended my literature review by including the synthesis of the limitations of CLT and have proposed my innovative approach the culturally responsive communicative teaching (CRCLT) to provide a more deliberate theoretical rationale for the use of role-play.

I also decided on the central phenomenon of my research: How can Chinese EFL teachers make effective use of role-play to improve their students' communicative and cultural competence? This broad question has been divided into two special considerations, namely: How role-play is implemented by

Chinese EFL teachers and what issues they need to consider when using role-play.

To answer these questions, I did a multiple case study of seven Chinese EFL

teachers at work. I collected information from diverse sources including

interviews, direct classroom observations, focus group discussions and

questionnaires to ensure data triangulation. Hopefully, such a study might be

helpful not only to EFL teachers and students in China but also to those in other

countries as it may shed new light on the previous research in the field by offering

detailed information from classrooms as well as promote further discussion about

the issues teachers need to consider in their practice of role-play in special cultural

contexts worldwide. As a result, there might be an increased use of role-play in

China and the use of role-play will not only be limited to address the culture of

the target language. Although these changes will not take place overnight, I

believe my study will contribute to promote innovations and changes to improve

the current situation in China.

### 1.3.2 Research Rationale

In China, as the goal of language education recently has shifted from

teaching linguistic competence to communicative competence, the

Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) has gained attention and

teachers are encouraged to use role-play as extended activities for CLT (Rao,

1996). Some schools and universities now require teachers to integrate

role-play-based activities into their teaching on a regular basis. Through my

experience as an EFL teacher in one such school, I became familiar with

role-play as a language teaching strategy and experienced its benefits in

improving my students' English communicative ability. However, like my

colleagues, I also encountered several problems such as difficulty in classroom management and the lack of some students' participation when I conducted role-playing activities in class. Since my pre-service training did not provide sufficient knowledge and skills to deal with such problems in class, I felt the need to learn useful techniques and strategies for using role-play to assist my practice.

In reviewing the relevant literature in order to find theoretical support for my practice, I identified three main gaps. First, while many studies have proposed role-play as a powerful language teaching technique (Bang, 2003; Makita,1995; Payne, 1998; Tompkins, 1998; Sato, 2001; Van Ments, 1999), very little has been written about the specific steps and strategies necessary to assist teachers' classroom practice (Johnson, 1998). Thus, there is a lack in the literature that guides classroom practice. Second, most literature reviewed is limited to discussions about the general benefits of role-play in education. This points to a lack of a comprehensive theoretical rationale in the positioning of role-play within the EFL curriculum (Lin, 2006). Third, although most studies discussed the use of role-play in meeting students' needs; few were conducted in authentic classroom settings and therefore, teachers' needs and concerns were not adequately addressed. Especially in China, where the use of role-play is still in the beginning stages, few studies have examined role-play implementation from Chinese EFL teachers' perspectives. Therefore, I feel the need to further examine the use of role-play in authentic contexts, addressing classroom teachers' needs (pedagogy & theory) and context.

### *1.3.3 Research Literature*

A detailed report of my review of the research literature is included to provide a comprehensive and deliberate theoretical framework for this particular study. The theoretical framework has been developed primarily from a synthesis of research literature that helped to contribute

1) a general presentation of the research context with focus on the Chinese EFL education situation proposing the CRCLT approach to address the needs of such a situation;

2) a brief rationale for positioning role-play in EFL education and for implementing such a study including a review of language and SLA theories and the social cultural dimension of EFL education; and

3) a detailed introduction of role-play literature and studies in an effort to redefine role-play in EFL education.

It is important to note that these three themes interact with each other and play an equally important role in contributing a theoretical framework to the research.

### *1.3.4 Purpose of the Research*

The purpose of this proposed study was to: 1) investigate the use of role-play in EFL classrooms and identify issues that emerge from the use of role-play as an EFL instruction technique; 2) identify the perspectives from Chinese EFL teachers in their classroom practice and develop more understanding of the use of role-play in Chinese EFL education; 3) offer EFL teachers, who have limited experience and knowledge of role-play pedagogical support of what is meant by role-play in EFL education; 4) initiate a further

discussion among EFL teachers on the use of role-play as a teaching technique and; 5) promote comprehensive and deeper research studies in the field. In essence, my study aims to present a window onto the understanding of incorporating role-play in EFL classrooms as a teaching technique and thereby shed new light on existing research on role-play in language education.

### 1.3.5 Research Questions

The main research question is: How can EFL teachers make effective use of role-play in classroom practice? For the purpose of the study, I divide this broad question into two sub questions:

1. How is role-play used by Chinese EFL teachers as a teaching technique to enrich EFL instruction in their classes?

2. What issues do Chinese EFL teachers need to attend to while using role-play in real classrooms?

### 1.3.6 Research Methodology

Through a multiple case study of seven teachers and some of their students in an authentic Chinese secondary school context, I gathered data from various resources including in-depth interviews, direct classroom observations, student focus group discussions and subsequent questionnaires. By doing so, I hope to generate a holistic picture of Chinese EFL teacher's role-play implementation in secondary school classrooms and to provide valuable insights into role-play pedagogy in EFL education.

### 1.3.7 Research Findings

I have reported my analysis of the research findings with the purpose of locating the role-play implementation issues of common concern to Chinese EFL

teachers and their students, scrutinized in light of existing theories. While analyzing the data obtained, I have identified six major themes including: teachers' training for role-play, types of role-play implemented; course materials and class types for using role-play; effectiveness of role-play in class; problems with classroom practice, and roles and tasks of teachers in conducting role-play. Some of the findings corresponded to the SLA and role-play theories reviewed and provided vivid classroom demonstration of current Chinese EFL education trends. However, some findings challenged the researchers' views and indicated that the theory and instruction in literature may need to be articulated in real classroom settings. Moreover, most results were in line with my assumptions that my proposed CRCLT model was necessary in Chinese EFL education and role-play could be an ideal way to promote such a teaching model if effectively designed and implemented.

### 1.3.8 Research Outcomes

The interpretations and the analysis of the data validated my two assumptions: 1) CRCLT is plausible to be used to meet the learner's cultural needs; 2) role play does have a place in EFL education as long as it is conducted in a thoughtful way. It also showed that role-play places great demands on the skills and abilities of classroom teachers and brought forward a variety of issues teachers need to consider while using role-play to facilitate their students' every aspect including intercultural awareness in language acquisition process. Outcomes of the study include a sample role-play project and a series of suggestions and recommendations that are helpful to teachers, administrators and

teacher training programme developers to create a better situation to encourage the use of role-play both effectively and communicatively.

### 1.3.9 Research Significance

The study offered valuable information on specific issues such as, whether role-play is a useful teaching method for EFL teachers and how teachers can make effective use of it. As the study was conducted inside walls of real classrooms, it provides a particular perspective from EFL teachers in China on role-play implementation in their classroom practice and makes role-play more accessible for EFL teachers who have little experience and knowledge of it. Moreover, the data analysis suggested that there were essential common elements shared by the teachers and perhaps by other EFL teachers as well. Therefore, it is not only valuable to EFL teachers in China, but also to the teachers in other countries. Hopefully, it will promote further discussion about the issues teachers need to consider in their practice both in and outside China and encourage further research and innovation in this particular field.

### 1.3.10 Research Limitations & Future Directions

There are two limitations to the study: the sample size and the time devoted. Future research could be pursued into all common and public schools including kindergarten, elementary, secondary, undergraduate and graduate schools with students with wider range of proficiency levels over a longer period of time. Workshops could also be utilized and integrated into future study.

## 1.4 Conclusion

To end this story of my research process, I would like to return to the poem of Ithaca again.

*Keep Ithaca always in your mind*
*Arriving there is what you are destined for*
*But do not hurry the journey at all*
*Better if it lasts for years. (Ithaca, Cavafy, 1911)*

To end this chapter, I would emphasize that the development of a researcher is a lifelong process and that no research is ever perfect. This dissertation is no exception. Due to time and sample limit, the results can not be seen as a representation of all EFL teachers. In future, though in the same or similar research field, my research topics and proposals will no doubt change. However, what remains unchanged is my faith that as a researcher, I have both the freedom and responsibility to understand what is known, question what is unknown, and strive for universal truth, or at least, part of it. I will keep my enthusiasm of role-play and continue my research on it.

**CHAPTER TWO:   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

**2.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, I present a detailed report of my review of the research

literature so as to provide a comprehensive and deliberate theoretical framework

for this particular study. The theoretical framework has been developed primarily

from a synthesis of research literature that helped to contribute 1) a general

presentation of the research context, 2) a brief rationale for positioning role-play

in EFL education and for implementing such a study, and 3) a detailed

introduction of role-play literature and studies in an effort to redefine role-play in

EFL education. With all the three purposes mentioned, abundant research

literature has been reviewed and analyzed within the following three themes:

Research Background/Context

1) Chinese cultural background of EFL education

2) Foreign language schools in China

3) General EFL teaching approaches used in China

4) Two recently recognized teaching approaches in China

5) Proposition of the innovative CRCLT approach

6) Current EFL education trends in China

Theoretical Ground for positioning role-play in EFL education

1) Theory of language (international, functional and social-semiotic view

of language)

2.) Theory of Foreign Language Acquisition/Second Language

Acquisition (FLA/SLA) including the review of the factors that facilitate SLA

based on Scarcella & Crookall's   (1990) framework.

3) Culture & EFL/ESL education

Particular role-play literature

1) Concept of role

2) Role-play in EFL education

3) Role-play and easily confused terms

4) Role-play Classification

5) Strengths of role-play in EFL education

6) Potential problems with role-play implementation and suggested solutions

7) Particular previous studies related to my study.

It is important to note that these three themes interact with each other and play an equally important role in contributing the research theoretical framework.

## 2.1. Research Background

Since my research focused on Chinese EFL teachers' role-play implementation and took place in authentic classrooms, it is necessary to present a glimpse of the history of Chinese EFL education, the cultural background of Chinese EFL education, the Chinese foreign language schools and teaching approaches that are employed. By doing this, I hope to offer a detailed introduction of the research context and emphasize the research rationale. Furthermore, I believe this can also offer the readers a new window into the EFL education in China.

### 2.1.1 The Cultural Background of Chinese EFL Education

Like other aspects of education, Chinese EFL education is also greatly influenced by the ontological and epistemological beliefs of Confucius which advocates that truth has been manifested in the past and it is our duty to study the past, distinguish good from evil in order to attain this truth. Knowledge comes from the true learning of books and schooling which selects ancient texts, documents, songs, oracles and rituals. In essence, Confucius believed knowledge is not attainted by creating new things, but by studying the classics and making it

our own. The Confucianism doctrine remained a mainstream Chinese orthodoxy for two millennia in China and still plays an important role in our education system today. As a result, ever since EFL education became rooted in China, grammar-translation dominated and it still plays an important role in some less developed areas where students are passive learners and EFL education is synonymous with grammar instruction and rigid drills.

Having such a particular background so greatly influenced by Confucianism, Chinese teachers and students could be defined as diligent, self-disciplined, focused on getting high examination scores, and passive in classrooms. Some of them even have experienced cultural conflict in classes. More details can be found in Simpson's (2008) research "Western EFL Teachers and East-West Classroom-Culture Conflicts" which presents and explains the relevant historical and cultural background of Chinese EFL education and offers several culturally relevant reforms intended to help in the mediation process.

### *2.1.2 Chinese Foreign Language Schools*

Despite conservative cultural and spiritual elements, reforms have occurred gradually, among which has been the establishment of foreign language schools. As my study investigated role-play implementation in one such school, it is necessary to include an overview of those schools. Since the 1960s, with the effort of Premier Zhou, 13 foreign languages schools have been founded in China which specialize in foreign language teaching and aim to train persons with advanced foreign language abilities. After the reform and open policy, with more and more international, communication and cooperation, various kinds of foreign language schools have came into existence. Some are public middle schools, some

are private schools from primary school to secondary school, some are

international schools such as the Canadian Chinese school or the American

Chinese school. In those schools, western content based textbooks are used and

various communicative teaching approaches and techniques including role-play

are required to be used on a regular basis. They have superior resources and

facilities for EFL education.

### *2.1.3 General EFL/ESL Teaching Approaches*

"Principles and priorities in language teaching have shifted and changed

over the last thirty years, often in response to paradigm shifts in linguistic and

learning theory" (Polychronopoulos, 1996, p.26). Even in China, where

traditional teaching methods have dominated for a long time, the goal of

language teaching is shifting from linguistic competence to communicative

competence and the mode of teaching from single skill development to

integrated skills training (Huang & Xu, 1999). In this section, to present a

particular research background, I first reviewed a number of approaches that

have some relevance for the way language has been taught in China in the form

of two concept maps. Then, I focused on the Audio-lingual and the

Communicative Approach since the two have been dominant in China in more

recent years.

| EFL Curriculum Orientation | Trends & Approaches Richard & Rodgers (1986) | Objectives & Directions (Canale & Swain, 1980) | Implementation (Omaggio-Hadley, 2001) |
|---|---|---|---|

| Orientation | Approach | | | | | | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Traditional ↓ | Grammar-translation | Grammatical competence | × | × | × | × | Emphasis on grammar Little time for speaking |
| | Audio-lingual | Grammatical competence | Discourse competence | × | × | × | Memorization of set over learning native like accent |
| Cognitive ↓ | Cognitive ↓ | Grammatical competence | Discourse competence | × | × | × | First understand grammatical rules Then practice in limited context Grammar is taught deductively |
| Communicative | Communicative Language Teaching ↓ | Grammatical competence | Discourse competence | Socio-linguistic competence | Strategic competence | × | grammatical forms are taught and practiced in meaningful context to convey specific communicative functions |

*Fig.4 EFL orientations & EFL teaching approaches*

| EFL Curriculum Orientation (Richard & Rodgers, 1986) | Curriculum Orientation it reflects (Eisner & Vallance, 1974) |
|---|---|
| Traditional: emphasis on structure and grammar | Academic Rationalist: acquisition of structures is largely what education is about. (1974, p.161) |
| Cognitive: emphasis on cognitive skills | Cognitive Process: develop a repertoire of cognitive skills that are applicable to a wide range of intellectual problems. (1974, p19) |

| | | Develop language learning strategies | ⟹ | Cognitive Process: (see above) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Communicati | { | Train students to be able to communicative in English | ⟹ | Technological process: preoccupied with the development of means to achieve pre-specified ends. (1974, p.49) |
| | | student centered and enable them to express themselves | ⟹ | Self actualization: a means of personal fulfillment (1974, p.105) |

*Fig.5: EFL orientations & EFL curriculum orientations*

### *2.1.3.1 The Audio-lingual Approach*

In the sixties and seventies, the Audio-lingual Approach was considered as a "scientific" approach to language teaching (Omaggio-Hadley, 2001, p.111). This method, behaviouristic in approach is based on the principle that language learning is habit formation. The approach presents new materials in the form of dialogues and fosters dependence on mimicry, memorization of set phrases and over-learning. Structural patterns are sequenced and taught at one time using repetitive drills. Few grammatical explanations are provided and grammar is taught inductively. The four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing are developed in order. Vocabulary is strictly limited and learned in context. Teaching points are determined by contrastive analysis between L1 and L2. There is abundant use of language laboratories, tapes and visual aids. Great attention is given to native-like pronunciation. Use of the mother tongue by the teacher is permitted, but discouraged among and by the students. Successful responses are reinforced; great care is taken to prevent learner errors. According to Larsen-Freeman (1986), this approach addresses a need for people to learn foreign languages rapidly and is best for beginning

level English classes in a foreign language setting as all instruction in the class is given in English. When this approach was first introduced to China after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), many educators and teachers were overwhelmed by it as they found the approach not confined by strict grammar explanation. In addition, it required advanced speaking skills including imitation of native-like speech. Quite a few confuse the Audio-lingual Approach with the Communicative Approach because they see their students speak in class, but ignore the fact that the students are only speaking memorized phrases in English instead of communicating in English. The immersion programme in the school where I formerly worked still uses techniques based on audio-lingual approaches, and I heard from my colleagues in the program that they have found several problems with it. One of the major problems is: although the students can read and recite the text with an excellent native-like accent, they do not speak as fluently when they communicate with foreigners in real life situations. Also, they could do very well in the grammar exercises that are similar to those they have practiced in class, but they would make many mistakes if there are some changes in the sentence pattern and sequence. Such a problem represents one typical drawback of the Audio-lingual Approach: The target language is taught through passive listening and speaking and not with any rational explanation. Accordingly, students, as a result, were unable to accumulate a sufficient language base for meaningful learning.

In other parts of the world, the enthusiasm for the Audio-lingual Approach was dampened within a relatively short time (Chastain & Strasheim, 1976). Many language practitioners have found the learning method both

frustrating and monotonous, for the student as well as for the teacher. It had not

produced bilingual speakers and ignored the variety of learning styles and

preferences of individual students (Omaggio-Hadley, 2001, p.113).

### 2.1.3.2 The Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT)

#### Communicative competence

The Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) is the

currently accepted approach to second language teaching. Interest in it and

development of it began in the 1970s, when language educators found that the

then prevailing grammar-translation and audio-lingual approaches had failed to

foster real communication. Hence they began to search for more

communicative-style teaching. "CLT has a rich and somewhat eclectic

theoretical base of language theory" (Richard & Rodgers, 1986, p.71), among

which the most important are the functional view that sees language as a

vehicle for the expression of functional meaning and the interactional view that

"sees language as a vehicle for the realization of interpersonal relations and for

the performance of social transaction between individuals…" (Richard &

Rodgers, 1986, p.17). Based on these views, language study has to look at the

use (function) of language in context, both its linguistic context (what is uttered

before and after a given piece of discourse) and its social, or situational, context

(who is speaking, what their social roles are, why they have come together to

speak)" (Berns, 1984, p. 5). Therefore, CLT regards communicative

competence as the major goal of language learning and focuses on actively

developing competence in understanding and communicative meaning (Stern,

1984). Canale and Swain (1980) define communicative competence as the

ability to make use of language appropriately in actual communication.

According to them, it minimally involves four areas of knowledge and skills.

These include:

| Competence | Characteristics |
| --- | --- |
| grammatical | the ability of correct use of phonology, syntax, vocabulary and semantics. |
| socio-linguistic | the appropriateness of communication depending on the context including the participants and the rules for interaction |
| discourse | cohesion and coherence of utterances in a discourse |
| strategic | the set of strategies that are put into use when communication fails. |

***Fig.6 Communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980)***

CLT uses a functional syllabus instead of a grammatical one and formal

sequencing of grammatical concepts is kept to a minimum. Most instructions are

made in the target language and auditory input for the student becomes

paramount. Errors in speech are not corrected too often. According to

Polychronopoulos (1996), grammatical forms are used in various contexts to

convey specific communicative functions, such as describing, narrating,

persuading and eliciting information.

Brown (1980) asserted that situational factors such as topic, role of

participant and setting will affect the variation of languages uttered by the

speakers and he continued to say that in the communicative approach, speakers

can vary their choice of vocabulary, syntax, pronunciation, intonation and even

non-verbal features to tailor their message in different situations. Just as his

analysis showed, CLT makes use of real-life situations that necessitate

communication. The teacher sets up a situation that students are likely to

encounter in real life (Galloway, 1993). The classroom context is used to create activities to teach students how to react in a real world situation, not pseudo situations.

According to Littlewood (1981), the range of exercise types and activities compatible with CLT can be divided into two major categories: "functional communication activities" and "social interaction activities." Functional communication activities include such tasks as learners comparing sets of pictures; noting similarities and differences; discovering missing features in a map or picture; or one learner communicating behind a screen to another learner and giving instructions or solving problems from shared clues. Social interaction activities include conversation and discussion sessions, dialogues and role plays, simulations, skits, improvisations and debates (Richard & Rodgers, 1986). As Galloway (1993) noted, CLT can leave students in suspense as to the outcome of a class exercise, which will vary according to their reactions and responses. Students are motivated to learn so that they can communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics.

Recently, CLT has been adapted to the elementary, middle, secondary, and post-secondary levels, and the underlying philosophy has given rise to different teaching methods (Galloway, 1993). Even in China, where the traditional teaching methods have dominated for a long time, there has been a wave of enthusiasm for this approach. However, the adoption of CLT has also raised many questions and brought challenges in many fields including teacher training, materials development and testing and evaluation.

*CLT VS the audio-lingual*

In China, although a number of teaching programs, curriculum and specific teaching techniques have been in use under the name of "communicative," not many teachers know what is meant by CLT in ESL education, and quite a few teachers confuse it with the Audio-lingual Approach. For instance, I have observed some of my colleagues' English classes using role-play, and I found that although they claimed their classes were communicative, the role-play exercises they used were mainly rigid drills and exercises. The communicative activities only come after a long process of repetition and imitation of the text. This kind of class is more audio-lingual than communicative, as the students only interact within the language system, embodied in machines or controlled materials instead of communicating with each other in real life-like situations.

Based on the distinction made by Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983), we can find that Morphology/form/structure versus Meaning/function/interactive communication is the basis for the distinction between the Audio-lingual Approach and CLT. However, the principles and activities of the two approaches sometimes overlapped. For instance, in the Audio-lingual Approach, after the long drilling period, the students can do some modified communicative activities. Also, both approaches devote more time to speaking activities than other approaches. Therefore, to some extent, we can say that CLT is the new and reinforced version of the Audio-lingual Approach. However, the latter has its own strong points, and it is not proper to say that it should be replaced by CLT totally. Therefore, teachers should bear in mind that the two approaches have

different features and strong points, and each is effective for students at different

levels. Language educators should take a flexible approach to teaching and

design activities responsive to learner needs and preferences (Omaggio-Hadely,

2001, p.118).

*Critique of CLT*

While CLT has been adopted and popularized in EFL education in Asia

(Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2004), a group of researchers have identified problems with

implementing the approach within specific contexts and have raised issues such

as "cultural appropriateness for Asian learners" (Anderson, 1993; Ellis, 1996;

Rao, 2002; Sano et. al., 1984) and "linguistic imperialism" (Qiang & Wolff,

2005, p.56). As a result, researchers such as Hymes (1980) challenge the

suitability of CLT for Asian contexts and question the notion of "communicative

competence". Nunn (2005) argues that an important notion of communicative

competence is "appropriateness," and he cites Hymes's (1980, p.49) illustration

that such "appropriateness" is a "universal speech," related to the social codes of

speech communities. He claims:

> Learning to communicate appropriately has sometimes been taken to
> imply learning to fit into a particular way of communicating in a target
> community and students' own norms would then be seen as
> inappropriate, interfering with successful communication in a target
> culture. (Nunn, 2005, p.2)

Nunn (2005) disagrees with such "appropriateness" and claims that "it is

inappropriate to teach language that is only appropriate in limited situations in a

target culture that may never be visited by the students" (p.2). In a similar vein,

Byram and Fleming (1998) argue that the notion of communicative competence

only involves an understanding of the norms of social interaction of one

socio-cultural community and it should be expanded to help learners understand differences in interactional norms between different speech communities and learn to reconcile or mediate between different modes present. Based on this notion, they put forward the notion of "intercultural communicative competence" as an indispensable part of communicative competence and language teaching and learning objectives.

Besides communicative competence, "the principles and pedagogies within the CLT paradigm have also been discussed critically and extensively" (Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2004, p.2). Bax (2003) argues that CLT is now having a negative effect due to misplaced priorities on the role of the teacher, which draws attention away from the context of teaching and learning. In China, for example, most teachers regard having students participate in classroom activities using the target language as the prime priority, and ignore the students' individual learning needs and their cultural backgrounds. As a result, most Chinese EFL students have experienced cultural conflict and confusion and some of them have polarized. Those on one end regard learning English as the gatekeeper to a better future and they believe English and Western culture are superior to the Chinese language and tradition. Those on the other end feel reluctant to learn English and the Western culture and regard EFL learning as a betrayal of the Chinese tradition. If this is the case, then role-play will definitely have a position in our curriculum as a carefully designed activity that address both Chinese culture and Western culture, and might be very useful to eliminate students' cultural conflict and improve their intercultural competence. It is important for teachers using role-play to have an adequate understanding of the limitations of CLT and then

explore adjustments and new alternative to design their role-playing activities to fit into the particular cultural context and meet the students' needs.

### *2.1.4 Two Recently Recognized Approaches*

### *2.1.4.1 Integrated Teaching Approach*

According to Stern, language acquisition is in fact a process in which different language skills are "best assumed to develop simultaneously and to complement each other throughout the process" (1983, p. 399). In line with him, cognitive psycholinguistic theory states that a foreign language learner's competence in using the language is actually the combination of the learner's receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing) (Reviewed by Fan, 1999). Thus, it is important to integrate the training of different skills, resulting in an overall improvement of students' language competence. Based on these assumptions, the Integrated Language Teaching (ILT) Model was developed (Enright & McCloskey, 1988) and includes two major forms of instruction ("task-based instruction" and "content based instruction," reviewed by Oxford, 2001) which emphasized that second language learners should experience joyful leaning and develop both oral and literacy skills in a variety of real-life settings (Makita, 1995). This has laid a strong theoretical foundation for the rationale of using role-play as role-play achieved the requirements mentioned above.

Recently, the ILT has aroused Chinese EFL researchers and practitioners' interest. As seen from my research findings, the ILT has been used among foreign language schools and integrated content-based curriculum has been developed.

### *2.1.4.2 Culturally Responsive Teaching Approach*

As culture has become an increasingly important component of teaching in recent times (Baker, 2003), Culturally Responsive Teaching has been widely recognized as a useful approach to building the link between cultural and classroom instruction. The notion of such an approach is based on the premise that culture is central to learning and plays a role in shaping the thinking processes of groups and individuals (Hollins, 1996). According to Ladson-Billings (1994), it is an approach that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references and empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using such cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes. It recognizes, respects, and uses students' identities and backgrounds as meaningful sources for creating optimal learning environments (Nieto, 2000).

CRT places high demands on the instructors. Gay (2000) explains that the approach requires instructors to use the cultural knowledge, prior experiences and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective and teaches to and through the strengths of these students. He notes that culturally responsive teachers should teach the whole child and realize not only the importance of academic achievement, but also the maintaining of cultural identity and heritage (Gay, 2000). During teaching process, the teacher should not only explain the mainstream culture but also recognize and value the students' own culture.

Based on Gay's (2000) work, the principles of CRT can be summarized as follows:

1) CRT acknowledged the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
2) CRT builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived cultural realities.
3) CRT uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
4) CRT incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools.

Interestingly, from the research reports that I have reviewed, I noticed that despite the increasing number of educators even including those in China who agree on the value of CRT in education, most of the existing arguments for its effectiveness are found in literacy education for bilingual children in English- speaking countries. There is a lack of research in EFL education in a wide variety of contexts in non-English-speaking countries. Most of the existing arguments for its principles appear to give a set of discrete items and abstract instructions, which may lead to confusion and frustration of its practitioners in the EFL education field. Thus, it is necessary to redefine and adapt such a powerful approach in EFL education for Chinese classroom teachers. In the next section, I propose an approach that combines CRT and CLT, which I have termed as the Culturally Responsive Communicative Teaching Approach (CRCLT). The proposed approach attempts to solve the limitation of both CRT and CLT and to meet EFL teachers and learners' specific cultural needs.

***2.1.5Proposition of the Innovative Culturally Responsive Communicative Language Teaching (CRCLT)***

CRCLT is based on CLT and CRT and therefore entails the essence of both approaches. It can be seen as either an adapted version of either CRT or

CLT. Based on the two approaches, the central tenet and major principles of this mixed approach are illustrated in this section.

### 2.1.5.1 Theoretical Framework: the Expanded Communicative Competence

Similar to CLT, CRCLT regards communicative competence as its central tenet. However, this communicative competence is an expanded one and along with the four-part framework which includes grammatical, socio-linguistic, discourse and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980), it includes intercultural communicative competence (Byram & Fleming 1998). The major goal of EFL teaching is not only appropriate communication within one culture of one socio-cultural community, but also communication with cultural awareness between different speech communities within different cultural contexts. CRCLT focuses on the use (function) of language in context, including not only its linguistic context (what is uttered before and after a given piece of discourse) and its social, situational context (who is speaking, what their social roles are, why they have come together to speak) (Berns, 1984), but also the intercultural context (what are the differences in interactional norms between various socio-cultural communities). CRCLT regards cultural awareness equally as important as the ability to communicate appropriately in the target language. With such expanded communicative competence as its central tenet, CRCLT can be defined as a communicative language teaching approach that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of the language learning process. It is an approach that makes use of real-life situations that necessitate communication and understanding of the norms of social interaction of different socio-cultural communities. It entails communication in

the target language, communication in the culture of the studied language, and communication between the given culture and the students' native culture. It is through such communication that the students' cultural conflicts and confusions are alleviated and their cross-cultural understanding developed.

### *2.1.5.2 Principles*

Since CRCLT is a mixed approach, the principles listed below are built on the characteristics of both CLT (Nunan, 1991) and CRT (Gay, 2000).

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction between different socio-cultural communities in the target language.
2. The introduction of authentic texts and the incorporation of multicultural information, resources and materials into the learning situation.
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language and culture, but also on the learning process itself.
4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences, cultural knowledge and performance styles as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities in different cultural contexts outside the classroom.
6. The employment of a wide variety of instructional strategies that help to improve the students' language proficiency and maintain their cultural identity and heritage.

Seen from the principles mentioned above, role-play seemed an ideal technique with its widely recognized strengths in motivating students to interact in authentic contexts, developing their language skills while enhancing their language and cultural awareness (Maxwell, 1997).

The mixed approach CRCLT aims to help EFL teachers to maintain their students' identity and cultural heritage in the process of learning. At this time, the CRCLT approach research is only a broad and abstract notion and the effectiveness of its implementation really depends on the instructors. In my future research, I would continuously develop this approach and explore suitable ways to

attain the goal of CRCLT, responsive to instructor and learner needs and preferences.

### 2.1.6 Current EFL Education Trends

### 2.1.6.1 EFL as a National Endeavour

Recently, English learning has become a Chinese national endeavor at all academic levels. Since the last decade, there has been an explosion in the development of public school English programs and private English schools in China (Qiang & Wolff, 2004). Reports have shown that English study is emphasized and education reform is needed and encouraged (Huang & Xu, 1999)

### 2.1.6.2 Factors Hindering the Reform of EFL Education

*Unsatisfactory teacher preparation and recruiting system*

According to Qiang and Wolff (2004), EFL teaching in China is a case of "the blind leading the blind." As the country with most EFL learners in the world, China recruits a vast number of EFL teachers (both in China and English-speaking countries) each year. However, there is a lack of qualified English teachers that both have a good command of English and English teaching pedagogy. Qiang and Wolff assert that such a lack of qualified teachers is caused by two major reasons. First, there is unsatisfactory EFL teacher preparation. They claim that most English majors of normal universities (colleges for teacher preparation) only learn English teaching methodology to a limited extent and the time for their practicum is not long enough to prepare them to deal with different problems in class. Qiang and Wolff argue that a new teacher preparation system needs to be developed to train qualified teachers with

a good command of the language as well as the ability to guide their students to the communicative competence of English. The second problem is derived from a faulty teacher recruiting system. Qiang and Wolff claim that many schools do not have strict requirements for English instructors as there is always a low ratio of EFL teachers to students. Quite a few schools hire graduates with a major in business English or English literature instead of English teaching as long as they can speak fluent English. Moreover, they also find that

> as for native English teachers, the requirement is even lower. The diploma does not need to be in English literature, linguistics or education. There are some circumstances that native English speakers can be employed with a general degree or even a high-school diploma. Generally speaking, there is no strict requirement for English teachers in China, especially in rural areas. (Qiang & Wolff, 2004, p.11)

In sum, the failure of the current teacher preparation and recruiting system has caused a lack of qualified teachers, which is a big problem regarding China's EFL education.

### *Test-oriented curriculum and teaching materials*

For many years, the curriculum and course books in China have been test-oriented rather than driven by practical communication abilities (China Daily, 11/3/03). Both teachers and students at the secondary school level focus on English learning in order to pass the university entrance examination, which emphasizes written ability instead of oral English. Within this curriculum, teaching materials including course books and references are test result driven. As a result, students became almost "mute" and have little ability to speak and understand English (Ng & Tang, 1997). Although at present, a good many researchers and educators have called for reforms to the curriculum and teaching

materials, it is not easy to change the situation overnight since the traditional principles of language teaching have dominated for a long time. Though textbooks have been developed rapidly in recent years, a good one is still struggling hard to be nationally recognized. The currently popular *College English*, first published in 1989 by the Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, has remained unchanged for 10 years and is now facing challenges from other textbooks (Huang & Xu, 1999). However, changes are being made gradually, and in some special language schools, new curriculum and course books that emphasize communicative ability have been used.

### *Out-of-date language acquisition theories (SLA) and teaching methods*

According to He (2000), the in ability of many students learning English to communicate effectively in English is related to the teaching methods employed in China (As cited in Qiang & Wolff, 2004). While Language or Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories have been under discussion in the world for a long time and many new teaching approaches have been proposed, SLA theories and teaching methods have not been updated in China. "It is often the case that Chinese EFL teachers are exposed to a text book with only one or two chapters dealing with 20-year-old language acquisition theories" (Qiang & Wolff, 2004). For many teachers with more than 20 years teaching experience, CLT is a totally new concept and they feel reluctant to use it. Moreover, many teachers do not have clear knowledge of the differences and overlaps of various SLA teaching approaches. For instance, some teachers claim they are using CLT while their class activities, however, are limited to repetitive drills instead of real communication, which is more like the Audio-lingual than the CLT approach.

"Although with the effort of education authorities, CLT has been accepted by quite a few teachers, it still hasn't found its way into most common schools and there is a lack of special training courses of it for teachers" (Rao, 1996, p.468). There is still a long way to go before CLT overcomes the resistance and is used effectively in most schools in China.

*Teachers and students' lack of motivation*

Although EFL education has attracted more attention than before, the lack of motivation of both teachers and students still remains a problem (Qiang & Wolff, 2004). For teachers, the overloaded curriculum and low pay make them lack motivation for teaching, while for students; the boring test-result driven curriculum and course books deprive them of interest to study English. To solve this problem is not easy, and both the government and educational authorities have to make efforts to improve the curriculum and teachers' salaries, so that teachers can be motivated to make teaching innovations and to design exciting classroom activities such as role-playing activities to encourage their students to learn.

*Facilities & equipment problems*

As a developing country with the largest population in the world, China has its own economic situation which has caused several problems in education. For instance, the lack of facilities and equipment is always a problem that hinders the reform of EFL education. Though in most developed cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong, schools have language laboratories, audio-visual rooms and places for language workshops, schools in other cities do not have sufficient funds to establish these facilities. For schools in rural areas,

even a tape-recorder is a luxury. This problem will remain unsettled until the financial situation of the country has been greatly improved.

### 2.1.6.3 The Shifting Goal of EFL Education

Huang and Xu (2003) assert that "the goal of language teaching is shifting from linguistic competence to communicative competence" (p.4). They compare two Chinese national syllabi (one used in 1980 and one used from1985 to present) and find that changes have been made to the aims, objectives, methods and vocabulary goals in the new syllabus and priority has been given to exchange information through English (Huang & Xu, 2003, p.4). They argue that the changes in the national syllabus shows that the educational authorities are making efforts to carry out the reform required by the shifting goal of EFL education.

### 2.1.6.4 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in China

In the mid to late 1990s, CLT became more popular in China. Teachers were encouraged to use extended activities such as role-play and simulation games to encourage their students to communicate in their second language (Makita, 1998). Nevertheless, the adoption of CLT has been constrained by a variety of factors such as little financial support for teaching facilities and teachers, the oversized classes which constrain the effect of CLT activities and the lack of qualified teachers with sufficient knowledge and ability to apply CLT (Hui, 1997). As a result, CLT is still in its infancy at present and teachers need a deeper understanding of the approach (Davies & Pearse, 2000). According to Richard and Rodgers (1986), role-playing activities fall under the grouping of social interaction activities which are one major category of CLT. Therefore, the proposed study on

the use of role-play in EFL classrooms will help to generate a greater understanding of CLT and provide information on one of the teaching methods that Chinese EFL teachers can use to teach language communicatively.

### 2.1.7 Summary (New Concept Map)

Based on the detailed review of Chinese EFL education with its trends and teaching approaches, I updated the concept map given previously to present the expected progress that has occurred or will occur with Chinese EFL education in the future. It is also worth emphasizing that my research on role-play in Chinese EFL classrooms not only demonstrated the needs for such progress, but also proved that role-play could be an ideal EFL instructional technique for CRCLT if effectively used.

| EFL Curriculum Orientation | Trends & Approaches Richard & Rodgers (1986) | Objectives & Directions ( Canale & Swain, 1980) | | | | | Implementation (Omaggio-Hadley, 2001) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Traditional ↓ | Grammar-translation | Grammatical competence | × | × | × | × | Emphasis on grammar Little time for oral proficiency |
| | Audio-lingual | Grammatical competence | Discourse competence | × | × | × | Memorization and over learning native like |

| | | Grammatical competence | Discourse competence | Socio-linguistic competence | Strategic competence | Cultural Intelligence | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | **accent** |
| **Cognitive**<br>↓ | **Cognitive**<br>↓ | **Grammatical competence** | **Discourse competence** | × | × | × | **First understand grammatical rules Then practice in limited context Grammar is taught deductively** |
| ommunicative<br>↓ | **Communicative Language Teaching**<br>↓ | **Grammatical competence** | **Discourse competence** | **Socio-linguistic competence** | **Strategic competence** | × | grammatical forms taught and practiced in meaningful ext to convey specific mmunicative functions |
| Cross-cultural | **Cultural Responsive** | **Grammatical competence** | **Discourse competence** | **Socio-linguistic competence** | **Strategic competence** | Cultural Intelligence | **Increase cross cultural understanding Reflecting** o one's race, cultue and ethnicity xplore the culture ontext of the text literature as media understand other ulture and at the ne time understand ne's own culture Tang & Yin, 2001) |

*Fig.7: Predicted EFL curriculum orientation*

## 2.2. Theoretical Foundation

### 2.2.1 Theories of Language

### 2.2.1.1 Functional & Interactional View of Language

In order to position role-play within the EFL curriculum as a tool for language development, it is essential to begin by reviewing theories of language and second language acquisition.

Richard and Rodgers (1986) state three different theoretical views of language: structural, functional and interactional. The last two views provide the theoretical foundation for Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The interactional view sees language as

> a vehicle for the realization of interpersonal relations and for the performance of social transactions between individuals. Language teaching content, according to this view, may be specified and organized by patterns of exchange and interaction or may be left unspecified, to be shaped by the inclinations of learners as interactors. (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 17)

The functional view regards language as a vehicle for the expression of functional meaning and stresses the semantic and communicative dimension instead of grammatical features of language. According to these two views, the goal of language education should be the ability to function in real communications; hence, CLT regards communicative competence as the priority in language education. If, as the functional and interactional theories suggest, communicative competence is the goal of language education, then role-play has a key role to play in EFL education. Through role-play, the students function in extended realistic discourse in the target language and learn not only appropriate language use, but real communicative processes as well (Bang, 2003).

Furthermore, CLT is compatible with the "whole language" philosophy (Stevick, 1980), which maintains that the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) should be used as a whole and should not be learned or taught as

separated entities. As such, whole language philosophy also supports the use of role-play in language education because as Bang (2003) illustrates, role-playing activities are designed to integrate the four skills, as one activity flows naturally to the next. "To participate in the activities, the students have to verbally express their ideas, listen to others' opinions, read related texts, and work on projects as the role-play progresses" (p. 4).

### 2.2.1.2 Social Semiotic View of Language

According to Thibault (1990), social semiotics examines semiotic practices, specific to a "culture": learned and shared human patterns or models for living; day-to-day living patterns that pervade all aspects of human social interaction and distinguish one culture group from the other (Damen, 1987, p.367) and community, for the making of various kinds of texts and meanings in various situational contexts. Halliday (1979) points out that the socio-semiotic view of language emphasizes that language both represents and shapes. "The social structure is not just an ornamental background to linguistic interaction…It is an essential element in the evolution of semantic systems and semantic processes" (Halliday, 1979, p.114). Manning (2003) expands this view further and emphasized the socio-cultural and political dimensions of language by explaining the paradox of language which is that it can be used both to imprison people and set them free. Based on such a socio-cultural and political perspective of language, Baker (2003) contends that "every language will reflect values, beliefs and assumptions of the culture it came from" (p.2). Thus, "language and culture are intertwined and it is difficult to teach one fully without the other" (Scarcella & Crookall, 1990, pp.229-230).

Upon reviewing the related studies by the researchers mentioned above, it was apparent that culture and EFL education are interrelated and hence, CRCLT is necessary as it includes the social cultural aspects of EFL education. Moreover, role-play has a place in CRCLT with its strength in preparing learners for intercultural communication by performing the assigned familiar or non-familiar roles and interacting with the other role characters within the given socio-cultural situation (Kodotchigova, 2001, p.4).

For the purpose of my research which focuses on role-play in EFL education, it is also necessary to review theories of second language acquisition in particular. The following section is a review of major factors that enhance second language acquisition.

### 2.2.2 Theories of Foreign/Second Language Acquisition (FLA/SLA)

Scarcella and Crookall (1990) investigate three factors that help enhance language learning, including comprehensible input, active involvement, and positive affect (p. 223). This section will elaborate on these three factors, respectively.

### 2.2.2.1 Comprehensible Input

Krashen's (1982) 'comprehensible input hypothesis' states that learners acquire grammar and vocabulary by being exposed to and understanding language that is slightly beyond their current level of competence (p.21). By guessing and inferring the meaning of linguistic information embedded in the communicative context, learners are able to comprehend grammar and vocabulary that would otherwise be too difficult for them to understand. This input is known as comprehensible input, or "i+1." Learners gradually develop fluency by being

exposed to i+1 in the target language. Namely, when the situation is communicative and cooperative, speakers tend to provide their conversational partners with comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985). If, as the theory suggests, natural communication results in comprehensible input, then role-play has a major advantage because it can provide learners with large quantities of comprehensible input as it encourages genuine interaction in "real-world" situations with a focus on communication instead of accuracy (Maxwell, 1997). Since the consequences of making errors is relatively low, the participants are allowed to use and repeat simple statements and examine their errors with less pressure (Bruner, 1963).

### 2.2.2.2 Active involvement

#### Comprehensible output hypothesis

Swain (1985) defines comprehensible output as:

the output that extends the linguistic repertoire of the learner as he or she attempts to create precisely and appropriately the meaning desired. Its role is to provide opportunities for contextualized meaningful use, to test our hypotheses about the target language and to move the learner form a purely semantic analysis of the language to a syntactic analysis of it. (1985, p. 253)

As explained by Shehadeh (1999), this hypothesis suggests that learners need opportunities to produce the output and they achieve this by modifying and approximating their production toward successful use of the target language.

Studies have shown that the interactions between native speakers with non-native speakers (NSs/NNSs) or non-native speakers with non-native speakers (NNSs/NNSs) are prevalent and important for the production of both comprehensible input and output (Shehadeh, 1999). Role-play, with its various designs and different roles, can offer learners opportunities for interaction between

NSs and NNSs or NNSs/NNSs, because by interacting with each other in different social roles, learners can concentrate on communicating meaning so that they can draw attention to comprehensible input and learn to modify their speech and produce more comprehensible output. Accordingly, role-play is effective in promoting the production of both comprehensible input and output (Lin, 2006).

***Functional economy***

Grimshaw and Holden (1976) propose a different notion known as 'functional economy' to explain why learners may not acquire language despite exposure to large quantities of input. According to the review of their work by Scarcella and Crookall (1990),

> Learners put their efforts into activities which appear to them as the most essential. When learners are able to communicate minimally or sufficiently with others and to negotiate their social relations effectively, they then begin to expand their learning horizons and put their efforts to other objectives. (p. 225)

Therefore, many students will not feel the necessity of learning the more difficult skills since certain situations requiring higher communicative complexity may be relatively rare. They may perceive other activities as more attractive or urgent. If, as the theory suggests, students need to be attracted to learning by increasing the level of functional economy (Grimshaw & Holden, 1978), then role-play can facilitate the learners' language improvement as it offers a variety of complex communication patterns and social relations (Brumfit, 1984) which allows communication to be dealt with at different levels of complexity, and thus is inherently motivating for language learning (Scarcella & Crookall, 1990, p. 225).

***2.2.2.3 Positive affect***

Scarcella and Crookall (1990) have presented another factor that is essential for successful language acquisition, which is called "positive affect." They reviewed the related research literature presented by several researchers such as Krashen (1982), Dulay (1978), Burt (1978) and Schumann (1975). The next sections will review the main components of positive affect, specifically, low-anxiety situations, affective variables and affective filter hypothesis.

### *Low-anxiety situations*

According to Curran (1972), a great number of students learning any foreign language seem to be gripped by fear and anxiety that magnify the difficulties of the target language This implies that some psychological factors must be considered in the foreign language classroom and that one of the teacher's responsibilities is to create a facilitative, comfortable classroom environment for self-initiated learning (Makita, 1995, p. 2). Researchers such as Burt (1978) and Krashen (1982) argue that low-anxiety situations are conducive to foreign language development. Bruner (1963) suggests three strategies that teachers can consider in creating such a low-anxiety situations for learning including avoiding harsh corrections of errors; allowing students to express what they need; and designing various activities according to their students' particular background.

A group of researchers (Makita, 1995; McMaster, 1998; Payne, 1998; Polychrononpoulos, 1996) have claimed that role-play is an enjoyable learning and teaching method that can offer students a low-anxiety environment. While doing role-play, the consequences of making errors are relatively low (Makita, 1995) so that the students are allowed to learn from their errors with less stress.

Moreover, role-play provides different life-like situations and students have freedom to create a simulation that best expresses their interests (Tatar, 2003). Hence, role-play can foster positive attitudes for learning by creating a comfortable learning environment.

### *Affective variables*

The theory of "affective variables" discusses some affective variables such as attitude, motivation, and empathy which may play an important role in foreign/second language learning process (Schumann, 1975). In reviewing Schumann's work on affective variables, Scarcella and Crookall (1990) find that: first, the learners' attitude toward the target language can influence their proficiency. If they have a positive attitude, they will be more willing to improve their language skills. Second, the learners' motivation to study the target language is also important. Third, a learner who has an empathic personality may be more successful in second language acquisition.

Scarcella and Crookall's (1990) review of Schumann's "affective variables" is important, but may not be sufficient for understanding the relationship between affective variables and the process of SLA. Other researchers have developed more comprehensive theories which define multiple factors besides Schuman's framework. The following is a review of "affective filter hypothesis" (Krashen, 1995) and "individual learner difference" (Galloway & Labarca, 1993).

### *Affective filter hypothesis*

Krashen's (1982) "affective filter hypothesis" intends to capture the relationship between affective variables and the process of SLA. It states that

there exists a "filter" or "mental block" which impedes a second language from "getting in." If the filter is up, input is prevented from passing through; if input is prevented from passing through, there can be no acquisition. Acquirers vary with respect to the strength or level of their affective filters. According to the hypothesis, a low filter will result when learners are relaxed and feel confident to take risks, and are in a pleasant learning environment. This theory is similar to Schumann's (1975) theory of "affective variables." However, it is more comprehensive and includes other factors. Krashen points out that the students with a positive attitude will have a lower or weaker filter and, therefore, they will be more open to "deeper," more intense input (Krashen, 1995, p. 31). Also, he states that attitudes toward learning and interests in learning are key factors that determine students' levels of motivation. Therefore, more highly motivated students will have lower affective filters and will receive more comprehensible input. Similarly, Omaggio-Hadley addresses the multiple factors that affect SLA and suggests that "learner factors such as age, aptitude, attitude, motivation, personality, cognitive style, and preferred learning strategies need to be considered in any comprehensive language acquisition" (1993, p. 63).

### *Individual learner differences*

Besides Krashen (1985) and Schumann (1975), many researchers in the field agree that both the rate and degree of success of second language learning is affected by individual learner differences (Ellis, 1992 as cited in Omaggio-Hadley, 1993, p. 99). These differences are summarized into three categories by Galloway and Labarca (1990) (as cited in Omaggio-Hadley, 1993). First, learners sense things differently, responding to the physical environment

around them in diverse ways. Second, learners have different social preferences. Some people prefer learning with others, interacting in small groups or engaging in competitive activities. Others may prefer learning alone and doing individual projects. Third, learners use different ways to process information mentally (Omaggio-Hadley, 1993, p. 65).

The "affective filter hypothesis" and the "learner factor theory" suggest that, according to learners' differences and the various affective factors of their learning, teachers must tailor their instruction to the different learner needs by using different methodologies. They should be aware of factors that can promote a low filter and ensure more comprehensible input from their students.

### 2.2.2.4 Culture & EFL Education

As I repeatedly mentioned, based on the social semiotic functions and expanded communicative competence, language and culture instruction are interrelated and EFL instructors should enhance their students' intercultural awareness. However, while the role of culture in language learning has been widely recognized, culture itself is somewhat difficult to define (Liao & Chism, 2005). Chastain (1988) stated, "second language teachers need a definition, a thematic organization, and at least an elementary knowledge of the culture" (p. 308).

Furthermore, according to Liao & Chism (2005)'s review, most EFL teachers oversimplified the cultural instruction. For instance, Robinson (1985) reported that in his lectures and workshops on culture learning, the responses of most teachers regarding the meaning of culture fell into three categories: products, ideas, and behaviors. Kramsch (1991) stated that culture is reduced to "foods,

fairs, folklore, and folktales and statistical facts" (p. 218), emphasizing, however, that the implications of culture for language learning and use are in fact more complex than "the four Fs."

In an effort to address the social cultural dimension of EFL education as well as emphasize the particular social cultural interest of the researcher, this section briefly illustrates the meaning of culture in EFL education

According to Daman (1987), culture refers to learned and shared human patterns or models for living; day-to-day living patterns that pervade all aspects of human social interaction and distinguish one culture group from the other" (p.367). Moran (2001) asserted that culture could take the form of products, perspectives, practices, persons, and communities; it involves interaction among people and changes from day to day. Kramsch (1993) also emphasized that culture is always in the background for learners, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them (Reviewed by Liao & Chism, 2005).

A vast number of researchers (e.g. Liao & Chism, 2005; Kodotchigova, 2001; Salies, 1995; Scarecella & Crookall, 1992) have noticed that "whenever a person studies a language, he/she is ultimately learning the culture of the people who speak the language"(Hung, 1983, as cited in Salies, 1995) and they argued that "communication is only possible if there is knowledge of the culture behind the language" (Salies, 1995, p.10). Teaching culture has been an important part of foreign language instruction for decades and there existed diverse strategies such as role-play to teach foreign culture that differ in goals, objectives, and context of application (Sysoyev, 2001). As reviewed by Kodotchigova (2001), sociocultural strategies can be seen as one of the efficient ways of achieving learners'

sociocultural competence within L2 communicative competence (Savignon, 1997), thus, preparing them for intercultural communication. Kodotchigova also argued that "role play can be seen as one of the instructional techniques of sociocultural strategy training as much will depend on the way L2 culture is incorporated in the role play" (p.4)

As I situated myself as a developing social cultural researcher with an interest in social cultural strategies (eg. role-play) employed in EFL education, the readers can notice a continuous emphasis on the social cultural dimension of EFL/ESL education throughout this study. In the previous sections, I discussed the social semiotic view of language which laid the firm theoretical rationale for the interrelationship of EFL education and culture education. Moreover, in the section discussing CRT and CLT, I addressed the problems with implementing CLT in specific cultural contexts and promote CRCLT as an innovative approach for the enhancement of the students' intercultural awareness.

### 2.2.4 Summary

This review of the literature on the theories of language and SLA together with emphasis on the social-cultural dimension of language aims to provide a broader understanding of SLA and provide a brief rationale for positioning role-play as a valuable teaching technique for co-teaching language and culture within EFL curriculum. The review of SLA is based on Scarcella and Crookall's (1990) investigation of three factors of language learning. However, the review is not limited by their framework and it includes other theories which Scarecella and Crookall have not addressed. Upon completion of the review, I have found that although research and theory concerning the development of second language is

abundant, no comprehensive rationale for using role-play in EFL education has yet been developed (Lin, 2006). The three factors Scarcella and Crookall (1990) discuss are valuable in understanding role-play and language acquisition, but are relatively limited and may only serve as a brief rationale. For instance, they only review Dulay and Burt (1978) together with Krashen's (1982) "low-anxiety situations" in one sentence and do not mention what teachers can do to create such situations. Therefore, I believe my study with a focus on the use of role-play in real classrooms is necessary as it might help to provide first-hand information on this issue and may also contribute to a richer, broader understanding of SLA as well as a comprehensible rationale for the use of role-play in EFL education.

By reviewing the theories of language and foreign language acquisition (FLA) / second language acquisition (SLA), I have also discovered that a number of language theorists (Makita, 1995; McMaster, 1998; Payne, 1998; Polychrononpoulos, 1996; Scarcella & Crookall, 1990; Stern, 1984; Tompkins, 2001; Van Ment, 1989 ) have noticed the effectiveness of role-play and started to make connections between this technique and improved SLA. However, I have also found that while creative role-playings is not a new idea, "very little has been written about the specific steps and techniques necessary to effectively teach and use this powerful learning tool" (Johnson, 1998, p.2). In fact, there is even little consensus on how role-play and other dramatic techniques are interpreted in education field (Tartar, 2002). Therefore, in the following section, I try to provide a general perspective of what role-play means in EFL education; first by reviewing the concept of role-play as well as various types of role-playing

activities; then by summarizing its advantages and disadvantages in EFL

education.

## 2.3. Particular Role-play Literature

Though the concept of role-play is not new, there seems little consensus

on the terms associate with role-play that are used in the education field. Terms

such as role-play, simulation, creative role-playings and role-play games are

sometimes used interchangeably (Crookall & Oxford, 1990), but in fact they

illustrate different notions resulting in confusion among teachers (Kodotchigova,

2001). Therefore, as Payne (1998) suggests, a different understanding of what

role-play is and what it involves needs to be explored.

### 2.3.1 Concept of Role

The origin of the word "role" derives from the word used to describe the

roll of parchment on which an actor's part was written. It therefore descends

directly from theatrical use meaning actor's part or role in a drama. The extension

of the concept of role to the way people behave in everyday life comes from a

similar need in real life for people to summarize or condense what may be

complex perceptions of the constituent details of another person's appearance or

behaviour (Van Ments, 1999, p.6).

In everyday life, roles may be ascribed to people in a variety of ways.

Some are allocated by social position such as teacher, principal and president;

others indicate relationships such as father and son, or husband and wife.

Sometimes, role is closely related with the context in which people find

themselves such as a school or a soccer game. By assigning different roles to their

students and offering them chances to play within the role, teachers can help their

students learn the correct role behaviour of an individual in accordance with his surroundings, and the student will communicate appropriately. Thus the students can practice and improve the language in a very practical way.

### 2.3.2 Role-play in Education

In 1987, Ladousse offered a new understanding of role-play by redefining it as "an educational technique, known to generate a lot of fun, excitement, joy and laughter in the language class as 'play' itself guarantees a safe environment in which learners can be as inventive and playful as possible" (Ladousse, 1987). This simple definition addresses the essence of role-play and gives it a firm educational basis. It views role-play from a broader perspective and differentiates it from theatre or other methods. Based upon this notion, the definition of role-play is illustrated under the following two headings, namely, role-play as a way of teaching, and role-play as a way of learning.

### 2.3.2.1 Role-play as a Way of Teaching

Although students need to perform in order to play their roles in class, role-play in language class has little connection with public theatre. Its purpose is not to produce a theatre play for an audience but to contribute to students' personality growth and facilitate their learning by having them respond to situations, dilemmas, or conflicts as they assume the role of imagined characters (Tatar, 2003). According to Polychrononpoulos (1996), the essence of role-play is the performance of roles, which in its simple form, is that of asking someone to put himself/herself into another person's shoes (Heathcote, 1995). In language classes, the teacher asks the students to behave exactly as they feel that person would. By doing this, the students can learn through interactions which gives the

students a greater understanding of what is happening around them and enables

them to use the target language for real communication.

Moreover, McMaster (1998) put forward:

> Drama is an invaluable tool for educators because it is one of the few vehicles of instruction that can support every aspect of literacy and language development. It encompasses all four of the language arts and helps build decoding, vocabulary, syntactic, discourse, and meta-cognitive knowledge. (p. 574)

As the essence or a form of drama, role-play can fulfill learners' multidimensional

needs in their language learning process. In sum, role-play is "an extraordinarily

versatile teaching tool, applicable to quite diverse students and their needs"

(Yaffe, 1989).

### 2.3.2.2 Role-play as a Way of Learning

Besides the interpretation that claims role-play as a form of teaching,

Milroy's (1982) definition of role-play is also helpful to understand this activity.

She gives a further extension of the concept in classroom practice and

demonstrates the essence of role-play as a method of learning:

> Role-play is a method of learning. The method is based on role-theory. Participants adopt assumed positions and interact in a simulated life situation. This occurs for some educational purpose, usually under the guidance of the person with the educational responsibility. The interaction is spontaneous and at its conclusion there is opportunity for discussion. (p.8)

Krish (2005) defines role-play in language education as a highly flexible

learning activity which has a wide scope for variation and imagination.

Larsen-Freeman (1986) explains that role-plays, whether structured or less

structured can give learners an opportunity to practice communicating in different

social contexts and in different social roles. In the second language class,

role-play is an imaginative enactment, where learners assume a part (either their own or somebody else's) when they take on a role, either prepared or impromptu (Kaur, 2002). This idea of role-play, in its simplest form, is to give students opportunities to practice interacting with others in certain role. "As a result of doing this they, or the rest of the class, or both, will learn something about the person or situation" (Van Ments, 1999, p.5).

### 2.3.3 Terms Easily Confused with Role-play

Interestingly, as I reviewed the role-play literature, I have noticed that though the concept of role-play is not new, language researchers did not reach agreement on the definition of the terms in language education. Such words as role-play, simulation, drama and games are sometimes used interchangeably, but in fact they illustrate different notions (Kodotchigova, 2001). Therefore, in this section, I will first review the terms easily confused with role-play before redefining what it is in EFL education.

### 2.3.3.1 Educational Drama

In 1998, Wilhelm offered a new understanding of drama by redefining it as "imagining to learn" (p. 3). This simple definition put forward the notion of educational drama. Some educators confuse educational drama with role-play since in the educational drama, the performance of roles are the compulsory part. While the performance of roles is considered as the essence of drama (Polychrononpoulos, 1996), educational drama is different from role-play. It is a rich and living art form, which engrosses its participants in many absorbing occurrences (Way, 1967) and should be considered as a much broader concept

than role-play because it contains many other elements besides the imagined role that the students play.

According to Payne, there are four types of educational drama: drama as playing, drama as process of learning, drama as interpretation of literature and drama as theatre. Each type contains many strategies such as narration, movement, sound tracking besides the use of roles (Payne, 1998). Role-play can be seen as a strategy of educational drama, or it is essentially the dramatic methodology serving an educational purpose (Bolton & Heathcote, 1999, p.ix).

### 2.3.3.2 Simulation

According to Crookall and Oxford (1990), there is little consensus on the terms used in the role playing and simulation literature. Just a few of the terms which are used, often interchangeably, are "simulation," "game," "role-play," "simulation-game," "role-play simulation," and "role-playing game." There does seem to be some agreement, however, that simulation is a broader concept than role-playing. Milroy (1982), for example, defines simulation as "a representation of real-life dynamic situations" with role-play as "the acting-out of a simulated situation by participants in assumed roles." Therefore, just as Ladousse (1987) explains, simulations are complex, lengthy and relatively inflexible, while role-play is quite simple, brief and flexible. Simulations imitate real life situations, while in role-play the participant is representing and experiencing some character type known in everyday life (Scarcella & Oxford 1992). In conclusion, simulations always include an element of role play. (Ladousse, 1987). It is a broader concept than role-play.

### 2.3.3.3 Language games

According to Pearn (2003), in the classroom, student activity will often take the form of either a game or role-playing situation. He argues that there are very close relationships between the two and explains that "games and role plays should not be seen as unitary or self-evident phenomena-two distinct realms of student experience-but as a spectrum of student based and student-teacher based interaction which maps the space for a wider sociological term, "play," within the ESL classroom" (Pearn, 2003). He suggests that these two activities are just the two different forms that "play" takes.

Like Pearn, Milroy (1982) also finds no clear line separating role-play and gaming. However, she sees the two as simulation exercises with differences on focus and forms. She states that the major distinction between the two is their different focus. Role-play is fundamentally concerned with role-pair-role-interaction, or rather relationships, and it offers participants an opportunity to develop an understanding of specific roles and to increase competence in the performance of them. Games seek to offer participants opportunities to examine the nature of cooperation in any given task and to develop individual capacity to evaluate, organize, and make decisions (p.179) The essential elements of game are competition and cooperation.

According to Milroy, the second difference lies in the different forms of activities. Role-play is a development from the free-flowing activity of play, while games have their prescribed regulations and procedures which confine the activity (Milory, 1982, p.179). Similarly, Pearn (2003) emphasizes that games in the ESL classroom limit lexis to what is needed in order to play the game and in addition, function to structure student interaction. He points out that games take a variety of

forms with different foci, such as guessing games, exchanging games, matching games, and board games.

As shown from the literature, while there are many terms for classroom activities similar to role-play, the theoretical position of role-play and these terms seem to be seldom articulated and little understood. Few studies have been made to examine how these different forms work differently at different stages of language acquisition and what their own advantages and drawbacks are. Even when some researchers tried to make differentiations, the information they gave is insufficient and contradictory. For instance, both Pearn (2003) and Milory (1982) agree on the close connection between role-play and games, and they make a similar distinction between the two. However, they can't reach consensus on what the connection is and what the similarities are. It is really difficult for teachers to have a clear idea of these forms from the limited literature. Therefore, further studies in this field are needed to breach this gap in order to help teachers know the particular features of those techniques and make effective use of them in class.

### *2.3.4 Different Role-playing Activities*

According to Littlewood (1981), there are five different types of role-playing activities: a) performing memorized dialogues; b) contextualized drills; c) cued dialogue; d) role-playing; and, e) improvisation. Although all types involve simulation, they are different in terms of "teacher-control and learner-creativity" (p.50). Each type of role-playing activities has been reviewed and analyzed by Makita (1995) in her research paper on role-playing activities. In my view, another important distinction between those role-playing activities lies in the different EFL/ESL teaching approaches they reflect. For instance,

Littlewood asserts that cued-dialogue is the point where role-playing becomes

sufficiently creative for us to think in terms of communicative language use"

(Littlewood, 1981, p.51). This is because, in a cued-dialogue, the students have to

listen to each other and decide their own response in different situations. This is

more like genuine interaction instead of reciting and retelling. Also, since the

conversation flows more naturally, the students tend to make more errors and

have a chance to improve their language ability by learning from the errors. In this

sense, this activity is much more interactive than the first two. However, since the

students still have to develop the activity from the teachers' instructions on

appropriate forms and meanings of the dialogue, and the correct use of specific

forms and structure are still the most important, this activity also involves the

audio-lingual approach to some extent. Therefore, I agree with Littlewood that

cued-dialogue serves as a turning point showing the transition from the

audio-lingual to communicative approach. Littlewood's classification can be seen

from Figure 8 below:

| Type | Teacher-control | Learner-creativity | Errors | SLA Approaches Reflected |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Memorized Dialogue | settings, roles, exact sentences | memorize sample dialogues | receive immediate correction | Audio-lingual |
| Contextualized Drills | settings, sentence Structures, roles | memorize sentence structures | receive immediate correction | Audio-lingual |
| Cue-dialogue | setting, meanings and forms, roles | respond in their own words in the given situation according to the meanings given | more errors are made and only receive correction after the | CLT |

| | | | dialogue is completed | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Role-playing | setting, roles | dominate the whole interaction; create different plots and endings | more errors are made and only receive correction after the dialogue is completed | CLT |
| Improvisation | broad topic or setting | create the impromptu dialogue themselves | more errors are made and only receive correction after the dialogue is completed | CLT |

*Fig.8: Role-play & EFL orientations*

However, despite the various forms of classroom activities under the term of role-play, few studies have been done to examine how these forms work differently at different stages of language acquisition and what their own strengths or weaknesses are (Makita, 1995). The few differentiations that are given seem insufficient and contradictory (Lin, 2006). It is difficult for teachers to understand the various forms under the term of role-play from the limited literature. Further studies in this field are needed to bridge this gap in order to help teachers know the particular features of role-playing techniques and use them more effectively.

### 2.3.5 Advantages of Role-play

The effectiveness of role-play technique in language education has been discussed by many educators, but perhaps the most comprehensive summary of the advantages to using role-play is that provided by Maxwell (1997) who

mentions that the essence of role-play is role-play which can develop students'

language skills, increase their motivation and interest and make it possible for

teachers to teach the language as well as cultural awareness (As cited in Sato,

2005, p.10). The following list is based on Maxwell (1997) and other scholars'

work (Sato, 2005; McMaster, 1998) on the advantages of role-play in language

education:

> 1) It enables students to learn and practice the target language in
> meaningful context.
> 2) It improves students' different skills needed for the language acquisition
> process.
> 3) It motivates students to be interested and involved in learning.
> 4) It creates low-anxiety learning environments for students.
> 5) It offers students a variety of experiences and improves their four
> language skills.
> 6) It helps to improve students' cultural and nonverbal behavior.

In recent years, language teaching has focused on the learning process

rather than the teaching of the language. The emphasis has moved from the

linguistic competence of the language learners to the development of their

communicative ability. Many studies show that extended activities such as

role-play and games are vital in developing the communicative ability of the

learners, especially oral proficiency. With such a transition in language education,

more and more educators have recognized the value of role-play in language

instruction. However, most of the existing arguments for its effectiveness are not

found in the EFL education field and they appear to give a set of discrete items,

which may lead to confusion and frustration among role-play practitioners.

Therefore, below, I group and analyze the effectiveness of role-play in teaching

EFL, based on the published documents, in order to give classroom teachers a

better idea of its "power" in language education.

There are many advantages of using role-play in language education. Maxwell (1997) mentions that role-play, in which students convey and reinforce information, can develop their language skills, increase their motivation and interest, and teachers can teach the language as well as cultural awareness (As cited in Sato, 2005, p.10). Based on his statement and other researchers' list of benefits of this approach, the major advantages could be summarized in the following headings.

*2.3.5.1 Meaningful Contexts to Practise the Target Language*

Makita (1995) states that the use of different types of role-playing activities can enable the teacher to provide students with the opportunity to practise the target language in a variety of meaningful contexts. By practising the target language in different roles, students consolidate and review their knowledge of word order, phrasing, and punctuation that contributes to the meaning of a written sentence. By relating the knowledge they get from classrooms to their daily life, they acquire and practise their knowledge visually, aurally, and kinesthetically and thus they can remember the language context long after they have forgotten much of the learning which they obtained in other ways.

*2.3.5.2 Students' Different Skills Needed for the Language Process*

Studies have shown that role-play can be used effectively to improve students other skills besides language skills. For instance, Milroy (1982) mentions that role-play can be used to improve the students' interpersonal and communicative skills.

Although conventional methods of teaching and learning such as lectures, reading and writing can be used successfully to help students acquire language

knowledge of factual material, to read and hear about something is still different from experiencing it. No matter how much reading and observing students undertake, the only way to develop communication skills is by using them in actual interpersonal situations. The different roles designed in role-play offer the students opportunities to practice their oral skills in various types of behavior and give life and immediacy to academic descriptive material.

For instance, the use of role-play in learning and practising a conversation between a customer and a waitress at a restaurant not only consolidates the students' knowledge of certain vocabulary and grammar used in similar situations but also brings home to the students some aspects of behaviors, such as the skills of starting a conversation and the development of good human relations. Therefore, role-play clearly promotes effective interpersonal relations and social transactions among participants.

### 2.3.5.3 Students' Increased Motivation

As the essence of all dramatic activities, role-play is used with the principle that drama directly involves the child and thus could motivate the child to learn (Smith, 1972). During the stage of role-play, students have the opportunity to add new elements to the sample text, which enables them to express their hidden feelings and relate what they have learnt before to what they have just learnt. Instead of the regular way of sitting still and hearing lectures, they become participants of the class which makes them more interested and involved in learning. They can both present and monitor their own comprehension of the context and by receiving and offering simple, direct and rapid feedback, they find and correct their mistakes in time and improve their language skills

efficiently. Moreover, in order to get better comments, the students of the same group learn to cooperate with each other in order to compete with other groups. Therefore, role-play can also promote cooperation and competition in class which stimulates every student to learn.

### 2.3.5.4 Low-anxiety Learning Environment for Students

While doing role-play, the students have an opportunity to interpret their roles in the target language creatively. The teachers seldom interfere when the students make mistakes and this will decrease the anxiety of most students, especially shy ones. Also since role-play is much like doing a mini-drama, the students know that they are not displaying their own personalities. Therefore, as Ladousse (1987) comments, the use of role-play provides a mask for students and encourages them to feel liberated in performing. Moreover, while doing role-play, the students who are better at acting than speaking can have a chance to participate. They can express themselves by both words and actions, which will allow them to engage in the class activity instead of sitting or standing still in a normal classroom (Chesler & Fox, 1966, p.14). This can release their anxiety of being different and isolated in class and could increase their self-image.

### 2.3.5.5 Variety of Experiences & Four Language Skills

While most researchers agree that role-play is effective in developing a learner's verbal interaction skills, few research studies have been done to explore its effectiveness in developing reading and writing skills. The most relevant and comprehensive research in this field that I have found is Scarcella and Crookall's (1990) review of the effectiveness of simulation in improving the four language skills. Since role-play is widely recognized as an element of simulation, there are

many similarities between its advantages and those of simulation. In the following section, I try to analyze the effectiveness of role-play in developing specific language skills based on Scarcella and Crookall's work with my own interpretation.

### 2.3.5.6 Students' Verbal Interaction Skills

Of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as 'speaker' of that language, as if speaking includes all other kinds of knowing and many foreigners are primarily interested in learning verbal interaction skills. Classroom activities that develop learners' ability to express themselves through speech would, therefore, seem an important component of a language course (Ur, 1996, p.120). Role-play is one of the effective speaking activities that teachers may use.

*Canale & Swain's "communicative competence"*

Since the beginning of the 1970s, the communicative competence wave has swept across the language teaching world. There has been growing emphasis on communication, in which tasks focus on meaning rather than form. Learning for communicative competence---the ability to use language appropriately--- has gained prominence instead of the linguistic competence of knowing grammatical rules. Language proficiency includes not only knowledge of phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and semantics but also the ability to make use of this knowledge appropriately in actual communication (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Some studies show the limitations of the traditional language classroom in developing communicative competence. Scarcella and Crookall (1990) review the

work of researchers such as Henzl (1979), Holmes and Brown (1976) and find that they have pointed out that only in the classroom does one speaker (the teacher) normally control the entire conversation. In addition, they also note that researchers such as Stubbs (1976), and Long and Sato (1983) claim that only in the classroom are conversational participants so frequently asked to answer questions that demonstrate knowledge, which is always about grammatical features. There is little room for genuine communication to occur. Scarcella and Crookall (1990) argue that since the teachers determine the whole speaking process, if they do not deal with the full range of types of communication found in the real world, students are less likely to have a full picture of how language is used in the "outside" world (p.228).

Role-play activities can compensate for the limitations of the traditional teacher-dominated language classroom. They provide students with a variety of conversational models between different roles and this changes the class to student-centered. In addition, by practising within different roles, the students can experience a variety of speech acts such as apologies, promises, congratulations, and even threats which they probably will not encounter in a traditional class. Being exposed to such genuine verbal interaction, the students gradually develop the communication strategies that enable them to continue learning after the class. Moreover, while doing role-play, the students can have their conversation flow freely without frequent interruption by their teachers, as the main focus of such an activity is real communication instead of accuracy. The students are allowed to speak more than given patterns, and they will make more errors while speaking.

However, the consequence of making errors is relatively low and the students are allowed to learn from their errors in a less stressful situation.

To sum up, in the intimate relationship between communicative competence and oral activities of role play, language is the invariable by-product, covertly acquitted and implicitly facilitated (Kaur, 2002). By relocating the locus of conversational control and allowing other language models to be introduced and experienced, role-play serves as an effective speaking activity which makes the language class student-centered and self-learning initiated.

*Reading*

Scarcella and Crookall present another specific skill involved in language development by reviewing Carrel's (1984) view that readers relate meaning to schemata which result from cultural expectations and prior experience. They analyze that when the readers' experiences and expectations are similar to the writers, reading is facilitated. When students are at the beginning stage of role-play (act out each role in the text they are reading), they can have new experiences and see things from their text in a new light, thus altering their "existing schemata" (p.226). In addition, role-playing activities can also provide the readers with exposure to a wide range of texts (such as letters, flyers, posters and even telegrams), to which they are not often exposed in class. For instance, the teacher can ask the students to play the role as sales representatives and customers at a supermarket. The students have to collect the flyers from the supermarket, read each catalogue and then interact with each other within the different roles about the information on the flyers. Both sales representatives and customers have to read the flyers carefully in order to play their role successfully.

As a result of doing this, students are motivated to read as this activity is more like a game than serious reading.

*Writing*

Role-play is especially helpful in teaching writing. According to Scarcella and Crookall (1990), it facilitates writing in the following three ways. First, it provides students with situations in which writing occurs naturally. In a traditional writing class, the students are always required to write in vacuum about the given topic. The process is dull and painstaking. Role-play can change this situation and offer the students chances to write about interesting, relevant and motivating experiences. For example, the teacher can ask the students to play the role as an unsatisfied customer and write a letter to complain to the company about the product he/she purchased. The students can discuss in groups about the content and format of the letter, and the teacher can choose to give them instruction or writing samples either before or after their writing. Second, role-play, like all simulation activities, can help students overcome writer's block by producing a "high degree of student involvement rarely found in ESL writing activities" (Littlejohn & Hicks, 1986). Third, it can be particularly helpful in the brainstorming and revising stages of the writing process. "It provides students with opportunities to see their ideas in action and to observe the consequences of their ideas ad the alternatives" (Scarcella & Crookall, 1990, p.227)

### 2.3.5.7 Students' Cultural & Nonverbal Behaviour

"Language and culture are intertwined. It is difficult to teach one fully without the other"(Scarcella & Crookall, 1990, pp.229-230). Many research studies have shown that students studying a foreign language tend to feel

frustrated by language stress and culture shock. Researchers such as Horwitz and Cope (1991) suggest that teachers should first be aware of foreign language anxiety and then try to make the students familiar with the culture. Then how can we effectively infuse culture and norms to language teaching and learning? The answer is role-play. By playing different roles, the students interact with each other in a variety of settings, such as home, school, the library, the supermarket, and the church. The use of role play can help them get to know a range of culturally sensitive areas such as greetings, apologizing and self-introduction relevant to these daily life settings. If teachers can make effective use of role-play and give students necessary instructions of the relevant culture knowledge, the students will consolidate their knowledge in a more practical and relaxed way.

Besides verbal interaction, nonverbal interaction which is regarded as silent language is also important in communication, fact-to-face interaction in particular. Nonverbal interaction includes many components such as facial expressions and body movement. It is important to notice that this kind of language is closely related to culture. While doing role-play, students can try different body language related to different discourse and situations. By doing this, they will get to know the culture and the language more deeply. Therefore, as Kodotichgova (2001) claims, role-play is one way of co-teaching a second language and second language culture.

### 2.3.6 Problems & Suggested Solutions with Role-play Application in Classrooms

While role-play has been being widely introduced into EFL classrooms, its disadvantages revealed in classroom practice have also

attracted researchers and teachers' attention. The most thorough studies

on the potential drawbacks of role-play have ben made by Van Ments

(1990) and Sato (2001). Van Ments (1990) offered the following list of

the potential drawbacks of the usage of role-play:

> 1) Teacher loses control over what is learnt and the order in which it is learned.
> 2) Simplifications can mislead.
> 3) Uses a large amount of time.
> 4) Uses other resources-people, space, special items.
> 5) Depends on the quality of tutor and student.
> 6) Impact may trigger withdrawal or defense symptoms.
> 7) May be seen as too entertaining or frivolous.
> 8) May dominate learning to the exclusion of solid theory and facts.
> 9) May depend on what students already know (p.16).

Compared with Van Ments, Sato (2001) addresses more practical

problems with incorporating role-playing activities in his research on

role-play for Japanese high school students. In his study, he summarizes

the disadvantages of using role-play into different categories: 1) the lack

of classroom space; 2) cost of a lot of classroom time, students' play

acting, chaos in the classroom; 3) the lack of grammar work; and 4) lack

of enough opportunities to participate. He also presents a series of

solutions to each of them. For instance, he suggests teachers not use too

difficult or too emotionally loaded role-plays in order to avoid classroom

chaos. He also advises teachers to emphasize the evaluation criteria for

their students to make the activity more effective for their students (Sato,

2001). I included Sato's list in this literature review because the above

solutions he presents might also be applicable to Chinese EFL classes, as

there are many similarities between EFL education in Japan and in China

due to the similar cultural background.

### 2.3.7 Teachers' Roles & Responsibilities

### 2.3.7.1 Teachers' Expected Competence

According to Van Ments (1989), "Although the use of role-play puts a

powerful tool in the hands of the trainer or educator, it is a tool which requires

much more skill and care than most educational techniques"(p.33). This is true

because during the process of role-play, there must be a constant interplay

between students and teachers, and teachers should have sensibilities and

receptivity to create the right environment for students to learn by doing role-play.

Van Ments (1989) broke down the competence which is required into

three aspects:

> A thorough knowledge of the methodology
> Sensitive to individual and group behavior
> Self-knowledge, maturity and balance.(p.33)
> Besides the basic competence mentioned above, teachers should also be

thoroughly clear about what roles and tasks they have in role-play

implementation.

### 2.3.7.2 Teachers' Roles

In her book "Linking literacy and play", Roskos (1995) provided the

following list of the roles of adults in role-play to create play environments and

improve children's literacy skills.   These can also be regarded as roles of EFL

teachers running role-play in their English classes as role-play shares with all

simulation and gaming activities in that it is highly motivating and the instructors'

roles are of vital importance.

The roles of adults in play

| | |
|---|---|
| 1) Onlooker: | Appreciates ongoing drama, nods, smiles, etc |
| 2) Stage Manager: | Gathers materials |
| | Makes props |
| | Constructs costumes |
| | Organizes set |
| | Make script suggestions |
| 3) Co-player: | Assumes role and within the role: |
| | Mediates dialogue |
| | Guides plot |
| | Defines roles and responsibilities of different |
| | characters |
| 4) Play leader: | Introduces conflict |
| | Facilities dialogue |
| | Solves problems. (p.19) |

### *2.3.7.3 Teachers' Tasks in Different Procedures*

The roles of teachers are crucial to the success of role-play, and once the teachers clearly know what roles they play, they can start finishing their tasks step by step. The following chart is based on the analysis of Milroy's summary of teachers' tasks to be fulfilled in certain procedures:

1) Preparation: Choose a relevant situation; determine roles and assemble information

↓

2) Briefing:　Outline educational purpose; declare situation and roles, give opportunities for role-takers to establish their own intra-personal information; make arrangements for the setting-up of the role-play

↓

3) Interaction: Support role-takes and draw attention to the aspects of interaction

↓

4) Discussion: Identify different learning points; help students put interaction into perspective, encourage each student to participate and help members appreciate the insights and skills necessary for the effective playing of roles in life situations similar to the simulated ones. (1982, pp.12-17)

Role-play is best used in teaching language when the teachers fully understand their roles and take responsibilities using certain techniques, following necessary procedures to accomplish the tasks mentioned above.

*2.3.8 Previous Studies*

In recent years, the benefits of integrating role-play in language education have been widely recognized and numerous researchers agree with Kaur that "role-play needs to be widely mooted, as the benefits are aplenty" (2002, p.2). Nevertheless, researchers like Ali Yahya and Al-Arishi mentioned that fewer articles have appeared on role-play in recent years, no books have been printed lately to promote it and the number of activities on role-play is seen to have declined in recent foreign language classroom series (1994). In line with him, Kaur (2005) addressed the issue of role-play losing its role in the language class due to the lack of resourcefulness and innovation on the part of some teachers. Despite these facts, I managed to find some although not many previous studies relevant to my research and briefly introduce them in chronological order in this section.

*2.3.8.1 Makita (1995)*

In her research paper "The effectiveness of dramatic/role-playing activities in the Japanese language classroom," Makita (1995) shares her experience in applying some types or role-playing activities that Littlewood (1981) categorized, and maintains that role-play can be a very effective classroom technique that helps students experience the language in context and learn how to interpret and exchange meanings for real communication. The list of different types of role-playing activities she cited shows that role-playing should not be one form of activities, and accordingly, "teachers can provide students with a variety of learning experiences by using different types according to their needs, interests and levels" (Makita, 1995, p.50). This list has offered me a general sense

of what is meant by role-play in second language education and has provided me with a deeper insight on the classification of this educational technique.

Moreover, Makita also emphasized that it was important to notice that students studying a foreign language tend to feel frustrated by language stress and culture shock (p.3). She then suggested that role-play can be used to motivate students to try their best to make learning situations less stressful (1995, p.4). Her suggestions reminded me to pay attention to the physiological factors during my study and broadened my view on the benefits the students can get from doing role-play.

### 2.3.8.2 Salies (1995)

Salies's article attracted my attention and is of special value for my future studies because of the following two reasons:

First, it gave an explicit and reasonable list of the effectiveness of role-play. Salies's article grouped and analyzed the discrete items of effectiveness under three main headings: illustrates unpredictability of real-life communication; teaches appropriateness; and boosts self-confidence (Salies, 1995, p.3). Each of the three headings was comprised of smaller items, among which I take great interest in one mentioned as optimal means to discuss culture sensitively. Salies cited Hung (1983)'s view that "whenever a person studies a language, he/she is ultimately learning the culture of the people who speak the language (Hung, 1983). She argued that "communication is only possible if there is knowledge of the culture behind the language" (Salies, 1995, p.10). Then she gave vivid examples of how role-play could help language learners to learn the different culture. For instance, through the effective use of role-play, a Japanese learner

from America learned that Japanese people marked gender through pitch and a Greek learner from Britain could learn that Greek people start speaking in a high pitch to denote politeness. Such types of culture appropriateness may never been achieved in a traditional language classroom since students seldom engage in genuine conversation. Role-play can overcome this problem and help the learners to have awareness of culture appropriateness.

Second, the article outlined specific classroom procedures for introducing and implementing role-play and described several sample activities. It included different scenarios of role-play related to real-life situation, such as "in the restaurant," "talking on the telephone," and "in a cocktail party." These sample role-playing activities suggested that everyday life can be easily translated into a role-play. Besides, the author also recommended that teachers create diverse numerous situations of role-play with the help of mass media. Such advice is valuable and offers an alternative for teachers to create role-plays. However, it is a pity that the article didn't include samples of role-playing activities at different levels. It didn't offer suggestions and information on how to use role-play with the same topic, but moving from more structured schema to more creative ones based on the learners' linguistic and comfort level. Therefore, this article only served as a general guide of how to create a role-play, but didn't meet the needs of language teachers teaching at different levels. It is worth mentioning that in the last chapter of my study, I include a sample role-play project "Christmas" integrating different levels of role-plays (moving from structured to more open-ended role-plays) on the same topic "Christmas" to teach different language skills.

### *2.3.8.3 Maxwell (1997)*

In 1997, Maxwell presented a paper "Role-play and foreign language learning" at the Annual Meeting of the Japanese Association of Language Teachers. In this paper, she provided detailed examples and descriptions of how role-play was integrated into a listening and reading course and was used to evaluate students' reading comprehension. The units of her article were designed with a short reading passage and a short listening passage, together with the explanation of an authentic video-taped segment. The example she presented served as a good sample of using role-play in different themes and/or content-based lessons while being fun and creative ways for learners to practice and/or improve their verbal and nonverbal communication in the EFL classes. As far as I know, most role-plays are used as speaking activities in China and the materials used are limited by short conversations or easy stories. However, her research presented an alternative and serves as a useful instruction in integrating role-play into different themes of class. Therefore, it has broadened my view on the use of role-play with different themes and materials in EFL instruction and made me start to question whether I had used role-play correctly.

### *2.3.8.4 Tompkins (1998)*

Tompkins uses the following format described by Richards and Rodgers(1986) to analyze role playing/simulation, and proposed an integration of role-play and other language learning activities in language classrooms.

Approach:
Theory of language and language learning
Design:
Objectives of the method
Syllabus model

Learning & teaching activities
Learner roles
Teacher roles
Roles of instructional materials
Procedure:
Classroom techniques, designs and procedures

His paper includes a role-play sample which serves as a

step-by-step guide to conduct the activity. This has helped me to develop

a general idea of what procedures teachers can follow to conduct a

role-play and, therefore, is quite valuable to my research on how teachers

can make effective use of role-play.

### 2.3.8.5 Kodotchigova (2001)

Kodotchigova's article addressed the issue of using role play as one of the

teaching techniques of co-teaching foreign language and foreign culture. This

attracted my attention because, although the merits of role-play in foreign

language education have been explored and examined by many educators, few of

them addressed its importance in teaching culture. However, this is the aspect that

we shouldn't ignore as language and culture are interrelated and cannot be taught

without each other. In her article, Kodotchigova expressed her understanding of

teaching culture with role-play and introduced a step-by-step guide to making up

a successful role-play. Her research is valuable as it provided a new and different

facet to the research on the effectiveness of role-play.

Kodotchigova reviewed previous literature on the definition of role-play

and analyzed what is meant by role-play in second language and culture teaching.

She used the term role-play to determine "a teaching technique in which the

students are asked to identify with the given familiar or non-familiar roles and to

interact with the other role characters within the given socio-cultural situation"
(Kodotchigova, 2001, p.4). Such a definition has moved beyond the previous
concept of role-play, as she used the socio-cultural approach to analyze the
role-playing activity in co-teaching language and culture. Moreover, she
examined role-play in preparing learners for intercultural communication and
expressed her understanding of its effectiveness in co-teaching language and
culture.

Furthermore, she suggested a step-by-step guide to making a successful
role-play exercise. Although quite a few scholars have discussed different steps
and various successions in applying role play in teaching, few of them designed it
for the purpose of culture teaching. Kodotchigova (2001) referred to the
socio-culture approach to explain the procedures for teachers to follow: 1. Choose
a situation for role-play; 2. Design role-play to develop the situation; 3. Linguistic
preparation; 4. Factual preparation; 5. Assign the roles; 6. Follow up ( p.5).
However, the explanation she gave for each step seemed insufficient. For
instance, as for the linguistic preparation, although she did mention that teachers
could introduce new vocabulary and elicit the development of the scenario before
the role-play, she didn't give further explanation and a teaching sample. Since she
claimed her purpose of the paper is to provide teachers a step-by-step guide, she
should have included some necessary samples for teachers to follow.

In conclusion, this article addressed the issue regarding the use of
role-play as a way of co-teaching a foreign language and L2 culture. It has given
me a new perspective on role-play implementation in the EFL classroom, that is,
role-play can be very effective for experiencing cultural principles and cultural

awareness if teachers effectively incorporate teaching culture into role-play implementation. This has added a new and different facet to my future research.

### 2.3.8.6 Sato (2001)

Sato examines the implementation of role-play for Japanese high school students. His paper maintains that role-play is an effective tool for accomplishing the shift from learning about the English language to using English to learn and communicate about topics relevant to students' lives in Japan. Among all the studies I have read in the role-play field, this study is my favorite for two reasons. First, it provided a detailed description and sufficient information on what role-play means in EFL education and what area of the learning process it can be grouped into. Second, some issues it addressed regarding to the implementation of role-play in Japanese EFL classes are also applicable to Chinese EFL classes, as there are many similarities between EFL education in Japan and in China. Accordingly, it can serve as a valuable reference for my research on issues regarding role-play implementation in EFL classrooms in China.

### 2.3.8.7 Kaur (2002)

By referring to various theories on communicative competence and Kirk's (1987) Cycle of Experiential Learning, which demonstrates a process involving active learning as opposed to passive teaching, Kaur addressed the issue of role-play losing its role in the language class due to the lack of resourcefulness and innovation on the part of some teachers. The author made a few attempts to solve this problem by examining relevant literature on the definition of role-play, and exploring the role of role-play in the curriculum as well as offering suggestions on how to promote the use of role-play. This article is a valuable

source for me because it offered a detailed introduction on role-play in language education as well as some practical advice, which is useful for my research.

This article addressed the rational of using role-play to aid the second language learners in acquiring the language in the language classroom, and presented some proposals of using role-play to provide the learners with more comprehensible output in the target language. It impressed me in the following two aspects:

First, in the part that gave the rational of using role-play, the author cited Cook's (1996) view that during role-play, some students will be pretending something they are not and may well practice the use of vocabulary that they may never need to employ in the future (Tyers, 2002). Then the author argued against this view and explained that besides improving students' knowledge of specific vocabulary and strategies, role-play afforded learning at diverse levels: not only cognitive, but also social and emotional. Moreover, with the practice of different roles, the students may be armed with increased role-awareness and will be better prepared for free interdisciplinary communication in the target language (Tyers, 2002). Then, he listed an interesting example: The students who acted as a doctor and suggested the patient take antibiotics four times a day is developing his or her strategies of making recommendations, instructions, and advice, as well as learning the particular form of the target language which arms him or her with prediction strategies that he or she can use when encountering real-life situations (Tyers, 2002). His explanation and examples broadened my view on the effectiveness of role-play, and made me realize that I may have used role-play in a very limited way in my class. Since role-play can afford learning at diverse levels,

it may have more functions than we have thought if we teachers employ it in a correct way.

Second, in order to make suggestions on ways to improve the second language learners' comprehensible output, the author introduced one specific role-play project called "passport" and provided related data from a case study on the project. The data comprised of role-play scripts by two groups of students, peer evaluation criteria, and a substantial body of learners' opinions from a questionnaire conducted after the role-plays. His findings showed how learners find this type of role-play useful and suggested that future studies of SLA could investigate further into output enhancement through role-play. I was impressed by his detailed introduction of data collection and analysis, which offered me useful information of a practical role-play project as well as some ideas on how to collect data for my future research.

Although quite a few articles have addressed the evidence in favor of using role-play in EFL classroom, most of them studied role-play from a theoretical perspective, limited to the discussion of the theoretical framework and rationale of it. There hasn't been enough data collected from first-hand research such as a case study. Therefore, this article has shed new light on the previous literature, as it not only addressed issues on using role-play from theoretical aspects, but also provided data from a case study and gave suggestions on the implementation of role-play in EFL class.

### 2.3.8.8 Liao & Chism (2005)

The authors explore the role of culture in the contemporary language classroom in Taiwan in the form of content-based curriculum for integration into the EFL classroom. She emphasized the importance of cultural learning and justified the notion that teaching students' native culture in an EFL language classroom can foster successful dialogues. Her research offered a detailed review of the cultural dimension of EFL education and addressed my particular interest in promoting students' intercultural awareness in EFL classrooms. Moreover, she offered a sample role-play based on a traditional Chinese legend about Chinese Valentine's Day that integrated the teaching of native culture in EFL classrooms. This sample role-play was valuable in that it not only proved the possibility to use role-play to address the native culture, but also paved the way for my sample role-play for CRCLT (responsive for the native culture, the target language culture, but also the culture of various nations).

### 2.3.9 Summary

From the documents reviewed, I have found three problems with the role-play literature. First, despite various given definitions of role-play, there is little consensus on what it means in ESL education. Also, some definitions are controversial and seem to contradict each other, which may cause confusion for teachers. Secondly, there is a lack of a comprehensive introduction of role-play for teachers in the literature. No comprehensive rationale for using role-play has been developed, and little research has been conducted to examine its advantages and disadvantages in classroom practice. Moreover, both teachers' and students' concerns for using this technique have not received enough attention and little literature has documented the method from the teachers' viewpoint. Therefore, I

strongly believe that the case study that I have conducted with the seven Chinese EFL teachers using role-play in their ESL classroom will help to address new questions in the field and shed new light on the previous studies. It will provide more detailed information about role-play implementation as well as introduction and guidelines of this teaching method to Chinese EFL instructors. Hopefully, it will give a new perspective of related studies and lead to more teaching innovations. In conclusion, my study will contribute to and extend existing work in the area of role-play.

## 2.4 Conclusion

This section has presented a review and synthesis of literature related to the theoretical background and special issues regarding the use of role-play in EFL education in China. It was organized around four themes including overview of Chinese EFL education, theories of language and FLA/SLA, the role-play literature, and the particular role-play studies that contribute to the current study. These themes intersect with each other and play equally important roles in providing a deeper understanding of my research context and a clearer theoretical rationale for my study.

From the literature I have reviewed, it is apparent that more research is needed to present a clear and comprehensive rationale for using role-play in order to allow teachers to have a thorough understanding of the significance of role-play in EFL education. Moreover, studies should be conducted in real classrooms to show its importance as well as teachers' and students' concerns for using role-play. Furthermore, social cultural dimension of EFL education should receive more recognition and "role-play needs to be widely mooted, as the

benefits are aplenty" (Kaur, 2002, p.2). In addition, language researchers and classroom teachers should not only confine their research to classrooms in countries where role-play is widely used, but also turn to look at the use of role-play in countries where role-play is still in the beginning stages and support teachers in these countries to use role-play effectively. Hopefully, this research in the future will encourage the use of role-play in EFL classrooms with more heated discussion and innovations.

Chapter three will follow with a detailed introduction of the methodology used for this study including the research approach; research protocol (the site, participants, data collection methods, the procedure and the data analysis); verification procedures (validity and generalization); ethical considerations together with its limitations and significance.

**CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

**3.0 Introduction**

This chapter illustrates the qualitative research approach employed in this study which focuses on teacher perceptions, practice and authentic classroom contexts in their EFL classes with role-play application.

The opening section briefly introduces the characteristics of case study and provides the rationale for using it. What follows is a section presenting the detailed research protocol including the research sites, participants, the data collection methods, the procedure and the data analysis. The chapter then proceeds into a discussion of the verification procedures for validity and generalization as well as ethical considerations. The ending section addresses both limitations and significance of the study.

**3.1. Overall Approach: Case Study**

*3.1.1 Definition*

Gall, Gall and Borg (2003) claimed that case study is "the most widely used approach to qualitative research in education" and defined it as "the in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon" (p.433).

"A number of other definitions or attributes of case study could be found in Nunan (1992) and Merriam (1998)" (Duff, 2008, p.23) but most of these definitions highlight the "bounded," singular nature of the case, the importance of context, the availability of multiple sources of information or perspectives on observations, and the in-depth nature of analysis (Duff, 2008, p.22).

Among numerous definitions given, I am in favor of Yin's (2003) description which, as Duff (2003)comments, "provides a definition that addresses

the issue of scope, data collection and strategies" (Duff, 2008, p. 22). Yin defined

the qualitative case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a

contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context especially when the

boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (2003,

p.13).

Brown and Rodgers (2002) further illustrated case studies in the language

education field. They mentioned that

> In language education research, case studies often involve following the
> development of the language competence of an individual or a small
> group of individuals. Case study research comprises an intensive study
> of the background, current status, and environmental interactions of a
> given social unit: an individual, a group, an institution, or a community.
> (Brown & Rodgers, 2002, p.21)

### 3.1.2 Classification

Yin (2002) categorized case study into single case study and multiple case

study and maintain that the evidence from multiple cases is often more

compelling and robust (Herriot & Firestone, 1983 as reviewed by Yin, 2002).

### 3.1.3. Rationale

"Given multiple sources and the'whole system'approach central to case

studies (Richert, 1991), qualitative case study methodology can become a

valuable method to develop theory, evaluate programs, and develop interventions

when it is applied properly (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p.544). Abundant research

studies have presented distinct advantages in selecting case study as an approach

and mode of presentation among which is the close collaboration between the

researcher and the participant, while enabling participants to tell their stories

(Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

Other advantages are listed by Miller (1996) based on the work of

Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis (1976).

1) the data are strong in reality;
2) attention is given to the subtlety and complexity of the case;
3) case study recognises the "embeddedness" of social truths;
4) case study admits "subsequent reinterpretation";
5) insights may inform teachers, institutions and policy; and
6) the data are presented in an accessible form. (p.35)

In the recent decades, there is an increased interest in case study as a

methodological approach in educational research (Miller, 1996) and case studies

have been used as a principal way in which researchers have tried to gain insight

into individual language acquisition (Johnson, 1993). Considering my research

focus (the exploration of the role-play application in EFL classrooms to facilitate

students' language acquisition, I decided to choose case study as the overall

approach.

Yin (2002) emphasized that "the decision to undertake multiple case

studies can not be taken lightly" as it requires extensive resources and time.

However, I still chose to do a multiple case study considering Miles and

Huberman (1984) as well as Merriam's (1998) claim that multiple case studies

provide much potential for both greater explanatory power and greater

generalisabilty than a single case study can deliver.

In conclusion, with considerations of the recognized advantages of the

qualitative case study approach in EFL education and the lack of its application to

investigate participants in authentic classroom contexts, I chose the multiple case

study design as the overall research approach and collected various data within

the approach. The following section presents a detailed presentation of the research design.

## 3.2. Research Protocol

### 3.2.1 Research Site

### 3.2.1.1 Rationale

The study took place in a provincial city in south China, the education quality of which ranked within the top three in the country (according to the statistics posted on 2005 Golden Fall Business Conference). There are many secondary schools and universities in the city, including quite a few special public and private foreign language schools. I intentionally chose one of those foreign language schools because role-play is reported to be used on a regular basis and the teachers there are more experienced in using the approach there. The information from them may serve as a useful introduction to those teachers who either have little knowledge or experience of the role-play method.

Moreover, the reasons I chose to study a secondary school was two-fold: first, most foreign language schools in China are secondary schools, as secondary school education is considered a crucial period for EFL education; second, I had been a secondary school EFL teacher before and I had experienced many practical strengths and weakness of role-play in EFL classes myself, which led me to the current study.

### 3.2.1.2 Glimpse of EFLS

Due to ethical concerns and for the convenience of data reporting and analysis, I intentionally called the school "EFLS." This section is a brief introduction of the school to offer the readers more information about the setting.

EFLS is one of the first foreign language schools established under the direct guidance of Premier Zhou Enlai in the 1970s. The educational target of EFLS is to produce international multi-talented graduates in the foreign language field.

EFLS has 55 classes, 265 teachers and 2828 students and more than 5,000 graduates including 200 diplomats. It has established sister-school relationships with 34 schools abroad including those from Canada, Japan, the United States, France, Australia and the United Kingdom. It has maintained an extremely high admission rate in the National Matriculation Tests (NMT) for several years.

3.2.2 Teacher Participants

The participants were purposefully selected using criterion sampling. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) asserted that, "criterion sampling involves the selection of cases that satisfy an important criterion. This strategy is "particularly useful in studying educational programs" (p. 234). For the sake of this study, seven teacher participants were selected from those who volunteered for my study and the table that follows illustrates their profiles with pseudonyms to provide confidentiality.

The participant selection was also based on convenience. At the very beginning, my ideal participants would be teachers of various grades (Grade 7 to 12) at secondary school to address my research concern. However, due to the fact that the teachers in Grade 11 and 12 were busy preparing their students for National Matriculation TEST/the College Entrance Test (NMT/CET), I only had

one participant from Grade 11 who volunteered in the study, and I did not have the chance to observe her class using role-play.

### 3.2.3 Student Participants

### 3.2.3.1 Students (Grade 7-10)

While the teachers in the classroom are the focus of my study, I paid attention to the perspectives and performance from students as well. I believe the students could give me a different perspective and deeper insight into the teachers' implementation of role-play. Their viewpoints and comments could serve as a supplement to the information from the teachers. Therefore, besides the teacher participants, I had 42 students (6 students of each teacher) making up 6 focus groups, and I interviewed them to get supplementary data. I asked each teacher participant to find students willing to participate, and chose 6 students that meet the following criteria: 1)their parents had signed permission forms, 2) 3 male students and 3 female students from each class; and, 3) they include both top students and ordinary or even "poor" students in EFL class. My selection was intended to ensure the generalizibilty of the study, although I found that regarding role-play implementation, the students from the same classes did not demonstrate sharp differences regarding their gender or English level.

### 3.2.3.2 Students (Grade 11-12)

Few teachers in these two grades had volunteered in the study and they were not willing to let me observe their classes. The reason was that they were busy preparing NMT/CET with their students and they had little time for individual interviews. Fortunately, one teacher, Huang, volunteered to answer my questions from the questionnaires and she also helped me to find 6 of her students

to answer my questions in questionnaires. Their answers were valuable and
important which helped me to collect data from various grades to address my
research focus: the teachers' role-play implementation at various grades in
secondary school.

Figure 9 illustrates the participant information:

| Teachers | Gender | Teaching Years (Years using role-play) | Degree Obtained | Grades | Students' proficiency | Students in focus groups |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Li | F | 19 | M.ED | 7 | Beginner | Annie, Linda, Nick, Sky, Steven, Tom |
| Lian | F | 14 | M.ED | 8 | Beginner - Intermediate | Lucy, Michael, Stiffer, Tuff, Victor, Viviane |
| Wang | F | 3 | B2 | 8 | Beginner - Intermediate | Angela, Claris, Genius, Joy, Tommy, Tony |
| Fang | M | 10 | B1 | 8 | Beginner - Intermediate | Ivy, Grace, Jack, James, Juliet, Kevin |
| Ding | F | 9 | B2 | 9 | Intermediate | Alan, Hamlet, Kathryn, Jimmy, Julian |
| Kong | F | 5 | B1 | 10 | Intermediate - Advanced | Bill, George, Jennifer, Polly, Vivien, Vic |
| Huang | F | 8 | M.ED | 11 | Intermediate- Advanced | Alex, Lydia, Rich, Ted, Wendy, Yuki |

*Fig.9: Participant Information*

Notes: B1: Bachelor's of Arts in EFL teaching B2: Bachelor's of Arts in English literature or business English

### 3.2.4. Sources of Data Collection

Yin (2002) argued that "the complete list of sources for collecting data in
a qualitative case study would be quite extensive" (p.85). With the focus of my
study, I chose four major data collection sources, and Figure 10, based on my

review of numerous researchers (e.g. Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2002) illustrate the

definition and strengths of each.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Respective Interview | Attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view | Target-focus directly on case study topic Insightful-provides perceived causal inferences | Pre-observation interview to teachers (Grade 7-10) about general questions<br><br>Post –observation interviews to teachers (Grade 7-10) about specific questions<br><br>Semi-structured interviews |
| Direct Observation | Gather data by watching behaviour, events, or noting physical characteristics in their natural setting. | Reality-covers events in real time Contextual-covers context of event | Observe one or two classes using role-play of teachers (Grade 7-10) Audio-tape the class and make field notes |
| Focus Group Interview | The process of collecting data through interviews with a group of people | Achieve a large quantity of data in a short time from a large number of participants Produce insight that would otherwise be less accessible without the group direction Elicit useful natural language discourse | 6 students of each teacher forms 6 focus groups, discuss about the general and specific questions regarding role-play implementation |
| Structured Questionnaire | The questions are asked exactly as they are written, in the same sequence, style | Participants get the same questions No response effect | To teacher and students from grade 11 with open-ended questions despite the structured questionnaire used |

*Fig.10: Case study data collection*

It is important to note that the aim of using multiple sources of data is to triangulate the method of role-play delivery in language instruction. Interviews and focus groups do not evaluate whether the method used was "good" or "bad", but simply "how" it can be done.

### 3.2.5 Research Procedure

I spent more than 5 weeks in EFLS to finish the procedure, including the six stages shown in Figure 11.

| Procedure | | |
|---|---|---|
| Stage 1 | Week 1 | Participant selection |
| Stage 2 | Week 2 | Pre-observation interviews, questionnaire |
| Stage 3 | Week 3 | The first data analysis |
| Stage 4 | Week 4 | The classroom observations |
| Stage 5 | Week 5 | The post-observation interviews |
| Stage 6 | Week 6 | The second data analysis |

*Fig.11: Research procedure*

### 3.2.5.1 Stage 1: The Participant Selection

Before the study started, I wrote an information letter of the study to the EFLS principal and asked for volunteers to participate. The principal was supportive and with his help, I selected six teachers for individual interviews and classroom observations and one teacher to respond to the questionnaire, all carried out at their convenience. Each teacher helped me to find six of their students whose parents had returned signed permission forms to form focus groups. Then, I casually talked to the participants so that they became familiar with me and felt more comfortable during the interviews and observations.

### 3.2.5.2 Stage 2: Pre-observation Interview

In the first interview, I explored the teachers' perspectives and experiences regarding integrating role-play in the EFL classroom through general questions

such as "How many years have you been using role-play as a means of advancing your students' language acquisition? What are advantages and disadvantages of this technique? What suggestions do you have regarding preparation of teachers to use role-play in their EFL classes?" Their answers were audio taped for later analysis.

It was worth noticing that all interviews were semi-structured interviews, "that is, guided by a set of questions and issues to be explored, but neither the exact wording nor the order of questions is predetermined" (Merriam, 1988, p.86). Either in the pre or post observations, I raised open-ended questions to address my research concerns and to avoid limiting their thoughts at the same time.

During my field work period, the students from Grade 11 and Grade 12 were busy preparing for NMT/CET. Thus, they had little time for individual observations and no classes using role-play were available to be observed. On this condition, I sent out questionnaires to Huang (the only voluntary participant from the two grades) to achieve information from more advanced grades.

After interviewing the teachers, I interviewed the students of each teacher either in focus groups (Grade 7-10), or in questionnaire forms (Grade 11) to uncover stories concerning role-plays from their perspective. Their answers were analyzed to supplement the aspects that teachers might ignore in role-play implementation.

All interviews were conducted in the Chinese language except for two teachers who volunteered to use English. I invited one bilingual Chinese doctoral student to double check my translation of their answers during data analysis to avoid bias and misconceptions.

### *3.2.5.3 Stage 3: Direct Classroom Observations*

After the first interview, I observed one or two classes of each teacher in a natural setting at their convenience. I sat in the back of the classroom, audio-taped the whole process and made field notes to record the major events.

### *3.2.5.4 Stage 4: The First Data Analysis*

I created computerized files and subfolders for the interview and observation transcripts generated. I also created a filing system for the coding phase of the research through Microsoft Word applications. Then I read each transcribed sentence line by line, identifying emerging themes together with coding important items. Based on the first data analysis, I adjusted some questions prepared for the post-observation interviews.

### *3.2.6 Verification Methods for Validity & Generalization*

Merriam (1988) argued that "as in any research, validity, reliability, and ethics are major concerns in a qualitative case study." In line with her, Patton (2002) maintained that to ensure the credibility of the findings, the researcher should engage in rigorous fieldwork and methods to maintain both the internal and external validity of the study. In this section, the following four verification methods are illustrated in detail

1. Careful sample selection
2. Methodological triangulation
3. Data analysis triangulation; and,
4. Continuous role awareness

The first was the careful sample selection. In order to obtain first hand information regarding the use of role-play in various grades, I used criterion sampling. I intentionally chose teachers who have been using role-play for over 3

years so that their experience might be helpful for those who know little about role-play as my study aims to offer a description of the use of role-play instead of doing an experimental research. I managed to include participants with various professional and educational backgrounds together with their individual differences including their gender and age to offer a wide range of perspective on the research. Besides teachers, I also studied their students with diverse backgrounds (gender, proficiency levels) so as to get supplementary data and allow both the voices of teachers and students to be heard, (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). I chose 7 teachers and 6 students of each teacher to ensure a richer description of the scenarios in real classrooms and for saturation of the data.

The second was "methodological triangulation" (Merriam, 1988) which combines dissimilar methods including individual interviews (for teachers), focus group interviews (for students), direct classroom observations, questionnaires (for grade 11) and field notes. Those various resources were carefully selected in an effort to generate a holistic picture of the central phenomenon and "uncover any number of possible truths and meaning manifested in the experience or words or participants" (Schram, 2003, p.97).

The third involved data analysis triangulation. The data collection, coding and analysis were carried out sequentially and simultaneously to ensure that data were collected and processed deliberately and logically. Similarities and differences among teacher participants and student participants as well as those between teacher and student participants were identified. In addition, relevant literature was continuously referred to during the analysis to enhance the depth of the study.

The fourth method was continuous role awareness or reflexivity. Throughout this study, I kept reminding myself of my role as a researcher in an effort to minimize my personal feelings or preconceived opinions, which would otherwise influence the data collection and interpretation. I asked the same semi-structured questions, avoided probing for answers, and respected the responses I received even if they contradicted my personal preconceived notions. I requested a bilingual Chinese doctoral student to review my English translation of the scripts. In doing so, I minimized my subjectivity and interpreted the data as presented to me.

### 3.3 Ethical Concerns

#### *3.3.1 Risks/Benefits*

There were minimal risks to participants and this research may benefit the participants in that it draws attention to the issue of role-play usage in EFL classrooms in China. It produced a series of suggestions and recommendations for teachers and language educators to gain a better understanding of how to incorporate role-play in their classrooms to enrich their EFL instruction.

#### *3.3.2 Confidentiality*

Pseudonyms were provided to the subjects and background information only contained general descriptors to identify the role rather than an individual. Interviews were conducted in a place mutually agreed upon by the subjects such as their work environment or the cafeteria.

Classroom observations were conducted with the permission of the school board, the school principal, the teachers, their students and their students' parents.

### *3.3.3 Right to Withdraw*

The participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without incurring a penalty of any kind, and they could decline to answer any specific questions should they choose to do so.

### *3.3.4 Data Storage*

The information collected is for research purposes only. Recordings and transcripts were stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office and all recordings and transcripts and other information gathered about subjects are to be destroyed within 5 years of the study.

## 3.4 Limitations & Significance

Due to the nature of this study and the small numbers of participants involved, it is important to note that its results can not be interpreted as being representative of all EFL teachers using role-play in China. Nevertheless, as the study was implemented inside the walls of existing classrooms, it might provide a particular perspective from EFL teachers in China on the use of role-play in their classrooms and may offer EFL teachers with little experience and knowledge of role-play a better understanding of what role-play means in EFL education. Moreover, the data analysis may suggest that there are essential common elements shared by these teachers and perhaps by other EFL teachers as well. Therefore, it is not only valuable to EFL teachers in China, but also to language teachers in other countries. Hopefully, the study will promote further discussion about the issues teachers need to consider in their practice both inside and outside of China and encourage further research and innovations in the particular field.

**3.5 Conclusion**

Through a multiple case study of seven teachers and some of their students in an authentic Chinese secondary school context, I gathered data from various sources including in-depth interviews, direct classroom observations, student focus group discussions and subsequent questionnaires. By doing so, I hope to generate a holistic picture of Chinese EFL teacher's role-play implementation in secondary school classrooms and to provide valuable insights into role-play pedagogy in EFL education. The next chapter presents my findings and analysis.

# CHAPTER FOUR: DATA REPORTS & ANALYSIS

## 4.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed report and discussion of my research findings. During the data analysis stage, I found that the collected data revealed distinct themes which were important in addressing my research concerns on how role-play is implemented by Chinese EFL teachers and what issues they need to consider to improve their use of role-play. Therefore, in this chapter, I have interwoven the data collected from teacher interviews, student focus group discussions and questionnaire answers, direct classroom observations and field notes according to my research concerns with the following six themes:

1) Teachers' training for role-play

2) Different types of role-playing activities incorporated in class

3) Course types and teaching materials used for role-play

4) Effectiveness of role-play in EFL classes

5) Problems with role-play implementation in classrooms and proposed solutions; and,

6) Teachers' roles and tasks in role-play implementation

As the data were collected from seven teacher participants and six students from each teacher, the information obtained was abundant. In order to provide the readers a clarified and clear report, Figure 12 was provided with the participants' names and background

| Teachers | Gender | Teaching Years (Years using role-play) | Degree Obtained | Grades | Students' proficiency | Students in focus groups |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Li | F | 19 | M.Ed. | 7 | Beginner | Annie, Linda, Nick, Sky, Steven, Tom |
| Lian | F | 14 | M.Ed. | 8 | Beginner - Intermediate | Lucy, Michael, Stiffer, Tuff, Victor, Viviane |
| Wang | F | 3 | B2 | 8 | Beginner - Intermediate | Angela, Claris, Genius, Joy, Tommy, Tony |
| Fang | M | 10 | B1 | 8 | Beginner - Intermediate | Ivy, Grace, Jack, James, Juliet, Kevin |
| Ding | F | 9 | B2 | 9 | Intermediate | Alan, Hamlet, Kathryn, Jimmy, Julian |
| Kong | F | 5 | B1 | 10 | Intermediate - Advanced | Bill, George, Jennifer, Polly, Vivien, Vic |
| Huang | F | 8 | M.Ed. | 11 | Intermediate-Advanced | Alex, Lydia, Rich, Ted, Wendy, Yuki |

*Fig.12: Participant information*

Notes: B1: Bachelor's of Arts in EFL teaching B2: Bachelor's of Arts in English literature or business English

## 4.1 Emerging Themes

### 4.1.1 Teachers' Training for Role-play

### 4.1.1.1 Teachers' & Students' Descriptions

The first question regarding my research focus that I raised during the interview was what the participants' understanding of role-play was and if they had received formal and systematic training in use of role-play in their EFL preparation. It is surprising to note that when asked what role-play really means in EFL education, half of the teachers hesitated and answered the question with little

confidence. Fang even asked me back what I thought role-play was and he explained:

> *Although my major was English teaching at college, what I learnt then were general ideas on English teaching. I did know that role-play was a kind of teaching technique just as games and discussions after I started to work in EFLS, but I don't know what it means in EFL education thoroughly. Did it mean something like an informal drama?*

Ding and Wang were also confused about the term role-play with simulation, drama, and games and they did not have a clear understanding of role-play. Only three teachers (Li, Lian and Huang) pointed out the essence of role-play as "the teachers assign different roles to students and they act the roles out by using the target language" (Lian). Lian and Huang had studied in Australia for a year and achieved the master's degree of education. Lian's explanation reminded my of my past experience with using role-play. She mentioned:

> *Frankly speaking, I seldom considered the exact concept of role-play. I learn the term role-play from the American textbook New Horizons in English (NHE) which includes a role-play text in every unit. After I took the master program in University of Sydney, I started to learn different terms of communicative activities such as role-play, simulation games and discussion and it was then that I gained more theoretical and practical support for the use of role-play.*

Li, the teacher with 19 years of teaching experience presented a similar story to Lian's and stated that she had been unsatisfied with her knowledge of role-play for a long time and therefore self-studied some related textbooks both in Chinese and English before she studied role-play more systematically in the master's program in a renowned teacher's college in China five years ago. Every teacher agrees there is a lack of theoretical and pedagogical support at school and Li summarized the situation of the training of the teachers to me:

> *So far as I know, role-play has been used in our school for over 10 years and many teachers as well as the school board are enthusiastic about this teaching technique. However, most new teachers in our school have little theoretical and formal training of the technique when they graduated from teacher's colleges. The common way for them to learn the technique is to observe classes using it given by us experienced teachers.   The problem is even we, the more experienced teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of the technique and when they observe our classes and imitate us, they will encounter the problems we feel hard to deal with.*

Parallel to their teachers, most students did not have a thorough understanding of the term role-play and everyone told me they learnt the term from their textbook NHE and their answers could be categorized into the following 4 types:

> *1) Role-play is a kind of game which is lots of fun. We discuss different roles and act them out. (Sky, G7)*
> *2) Role-play is a short drama but we do not need to wear costumes and masks to act. (Tuff , G8)*
> *3) Role-play is memorizing sample dialogues on the textbook and acting them out with some minor changes. (Juliet, G9); and,*
> *4) Role-play is a kind of activity which is very popular in our EFL classes. During the activity, we create a short play under a given topic and we then perform the play in front of the others. (Alex, G11)*

Regarding the training of their teachers, distinctions arose among the answers from various grades. Most students from Grade 7 and Grade 8 believe that their teachers had received formal training for role-play, while the majority of students from Grade 9 to Grade11 thought their teachers had received some training, but not formal and systematic. Ted (G11) wrote in the questionnaire:

> *I appreciate my teacher Miss Huang's use of role-play. It seems that she has received some training on how to do use the technique. Nonetheless, I hope she can improve her debriefing and evaluation for our role-play performance. It is better if the school can offer our teachers role-play workshops.*

***4.1.1.2 Teachers' and Students' Expectations***

Through the discussion of what kind of training they wanted to receive, I found most teachers and students showed interests in the topic and offered detailed and valuable insights. All teachers agree that they lack theoretical and practical support, and five out of the seven mentioned that they need particular role-play workshops. Li advocated the systematical study of role-play and proposed teachers' colleges to establish particular role-play programs. Lian put forward the idea of orientation to new teachers at schools. Ding and Huang suggested inviting foreign researchers to introduce related literature for teachers to self-study. While most teachers were expecting new changes regarding their training program, Fang addressed problems such as time limit and heavy workload that may hinder the changes. He said:

> *I do not think it is possible to establish a program at college in the school for the use of role-play in particular. As we have different communicative activities such as games and English songs, we do not have time to establish a program for every technique. The best way is to organize workshops on different teaching techniques now and then and have orientations for less experienced teachers.*

Distinct from the teachers, most students do not have specific ideas about what kind of training their teachers need, and 26 out of the 42 students claimed that both their teachers and the students themselves did not need further training for role-play in particular since they were already busy enough in the study of various subjects. Kathryn (G9) asserted:

> *Of course it is better if we can have formal training for the use of role-play, but if not, I do not think there is any problem because our Miss Ding can handle it well. After all, we have the coming National Entrance Exam for High Schools (NEH) and we have lots of things to prepare.*

The students from Grade 10 and Grade 11 offered me more thorough insights on the issue. Vic (G10) mentioned that he appreciates his teacher Miss Kong's role-play implementation and he believes she has formal training on using role-play. He added that it would be more plausible if the students were provided with background knowledge of the role-playing technique (both in theory and practice) which might help them to understand the educational purpose behind the technique and take the activity more effectively for English learning. Like Vic the majority of students from higher grades addressed the importance of continuous training either from workshops or out-of class readings. However, they also agree with Fang ad Kathryn that time and workload might become a hinder for the changes of the training programs. .

### *4.1.1.3 Findings and Analysis*

The description by the teachers and their students reflected a number of issues regarding their knowledge and training of role-play. To report and analyze these issues for my research focus on how teachers can use role-play more effectively, I drew Figure 13 in which I compared several aspects such as grades teaching, qualifications obtained and their students' impression between the teacher participants.

| Name | Grade | Years of Teaching | Degree Obtained | Training | Attitudes toward training | Students' comment |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Li | 7 | 19 | M.ED | Some | theoretical training | NT: 0 |
| | | | B1 | Little | | NNT: 6 |
| Fang | 8 | 10 | B1 | Little | theoretical & pedagogical | NT: 3 NNT: 3 |
| Lian | 8 | 14 | M.ED | Some | theoretical & pedagogical | NT: 0 |
| | | | B1 | Little | | NNT: 6 |
| Ding | 9 | 9 | B2 | Little | theoretical & pedagogical | NT: 2 NNT: 4 |
| Huang | 11 | 8 | M.Ed. | Some | theoretical & pedagogical | NT: 4 NNT: 2 |
| | | | B1 | Little | | |
| Kong | 10 | 5 | B2 | Some | theoretical & pedagogical | NT: 1 NNT: 5 |
| Wang | 8 | 3 | B1 | Little | theoretical & pedagogical | NT: 5 NNT: 1 |

*Fig. 13: Teacher participants*

Notes: B1: Bachelor's of Arts in EFL teaching    B2: Bachelor's of Arts in English literature or business English
NT: Need Training                                        NNT: Not need Training

Based on this figure, the analysis of the findings was presented under the following headings: the current training situation and the expected ways of training.

*The current training situation*

The transcribed data showed that most teachers and students did not have specific idea of role-play until they entered EFLS and used the textbook for which role-play was used on a regular basis. The teachers claimed that they learnt the term role-play by observing experienced teachers and gradually learnt how to use it.

When asked about whether they had received any formal training in use of role-play, three teachers with an M.Ed. stated that they had received training in how to use role-play, but they did not learn it particularly and thoroughly, separate from other teaching activities.

Fang and Kong's answers reflected they could not clearly distinguish between role-play and other terms such as simulation or educational drama. This confirms Kodotchigova's (2001) claim that such words as role-play, simulation, drama and games are sometimes used interchangeably. The results reflected my findings through the review of the role-pay literature that though the concept of role-play is not new, language researchers did not reach agreement on the definition of the terms in language education. Thus, it is important and meaningful to review and introduce the terms easily confused with role-play such as simulation, language games and educational drama.

The teachers without an M.Ed. claimed that they did not have systematical training in the use of role-play or other communicative activities at all. This also shows the lack of introduction and instruction of various teaching techniques to teacher candidates at undergraduate school. Although teachers with a degree in English teaching mentioned that they heard the terms "communicative" or

"task-based" language teaching at college, it was unfortunate that their training was limited by the general term explanations instead of thorough theoretical input and practical implementation. Such results reflected a confusing phenomenon in Chinese EFL education trends. On one hand, the goal of EFL education is shifting from linguistic competence to communicative competence and changes have been made to the aims, objectives, methods and vocabulary goals in the new syllables (Xu & Huang, 2003). On the other hand, Chinese EFL teachers are exposed to a textbook with only one or two chapters dealing with language acquisition theories (Qiang & Wolf, 2004) and little specific information is given to support their implementation of the language teaching methods. Lian frankly told me that this problem was hard to deal with as it is nearly impossible to change the national syllabus for teacher candidates overnight.

Reflected from the data in Figure 13, all seven teachers emphasized their need for theoretical and practical training to enhance their skills of role-play implementation. From Li's summary of the situation of the training for her colleagues at school, it was apparent that the school did not offer other practical support besides urging young teachers to observe classes using role-play. The teachers do not seem satisfied with their pre-service and in-service training for using role-play and other communicative activities.

*The expected improvement with the training programs*

All seven teachers in spite of their diverse educational and professional backgrounds agreed on the importance of continuous training of role-play, both theoretically and practically. They also provided the following suggestions to improve the training programs:

*1) Teachers' colleges open up particular programs regarding the use of role-play;*
*2) Schools hold orientations and workshops for teachers and students; and,*
*3) The schools and colleges invite foreign researchers to give speech and promote international co-operations.*

Nevertheless, some teachers also addressed the problems, such as Fang (lack of time and heavy workload) and Lian (current inundated curriculum used for pre-service training), that might hinder the improvement of training programs. Fang insisted that the best way is to organize workshops on different teaching techniques now and then and have orientations for less experienced teachers at school. Fang's concern could also be seen from Kathryn's (G9) description that the students were too busy with the NEH and both their teacher and they had little time for training.

Kong's case provided an alternative way of training to address Fang and Lian's concerns. Although Kong is not a major in English teaching, she told me that she had some kind of training from one elective course introducing diverse communicative activities at college, which helped her to carry out role-play even more easily than the others with a B.Ed. Her answer demonstrated the importance of systematic training of role-play for teachers and presented us the alternative to deal with the problem that Lian (un-updated teaching curriculum) and Fang (time limit and workload) mentioned. Although it is hard to change the pre-service curriculum, it is still possible for teachers' colleges to open up selective courses for teacher candidates or any English majors who might become a teacher which can save some time and resources.

Unlike the teachers, divergence occurred regarding students' expectation of their teachers training. As shown from Figure 13, students from lower grades (beginners' or at the transition stage from the beginner's to the intermediate level) believe their teachers had received formal training and they did not think their teachers need particular and continuous training in role-play activities, though they agree their teachers need some training when they were not that busy. It was apparent that although the teachers thought they still need improvement, their use of role-play had already facilitated their students' learning. As the EFLS promoted the use of role-play and required it to be used on a regular basis, the teachers at the school could have more and better resources of role-play and thus, their experience could serve as an introduction and instruction to those teachers at common public schools.

The majority of students from higher grades intermediate to advanced) maintained that teachers need more particular and continuous training. The reason for this might lie on the fact that these students had higher English language proficiency, which made them more demanding in EFL learning. Vic's proposition that the students could be provided with some theoretical and practical training of role-play is a valuable suggestion. Implementing his proposition might help the students to understand the teachers' educational purpose and become more involved during role-plays.

### 4.1.2 Different Types of Role-playing Activities Used in Class

### 4.1.2.1 Teachers' and Students' Descriptions

Depending on their training background, the majority of the teachers were not sure about the classification of role-play and some of them even asked me

back what types of role-play there were before they answered my questions.

Wang asked:

> *Can you explain the classification of role-playing activities to me? I, honestly speaking do not have a specific idea on this question. All that I can tell you is I give my students at grade 8 both easy and difficult role-plays to perform. I always give them sample dialogues to imitate and they only need to make small changes. Sometimes I also give them more difficult tasks to do when the text is not difficult and they can grasp it well.*

Like Wang, the majority of teachers except Li, Lian and Huang (with the M. Ed) did not have a clear idea of the classification of role-playing activities. And they categorized the activities into "easy" and "difficult" in light of different tasks they assigned the students to do while role-playing.

Lian and Huang categorized role-play into "structured" and "open-ended." They both told me that they had the ideas because they had learnt a number of communicative activities including role-play in their master's program and it was then they realized that most activities could be classified into "structured" and "open-ended." They agreed that "the structured role-play required students to imitate the sample dialogues from the textbooks while the open-ended one offered them more freedom for genuine interaction in the target language." (Huang)

Li, the most experienced teacher, also mentioned that she thought the differences between various role-plays lies in the limits and the instructions determined by the teachers for their students. She concluded that as the students had more limits and more instructions, the less difficult the role-play was. As an illustration, she offered the following example of role-play:

> *I used to teach a short conversation between a customer and a shopkeeper at a shore store. After making the students familiar with the text, I asked them to role-play the customer and shopkeeper. This was a*

*easy role-play because the text had all the information the students needed. After the students could grasp the text better, I asked them to do a more difficult one. I asked them to decide the goods they want to buy and sell and create a similar dialogue based on the text and add new interesting plots. They still needed to include the sentence patterns such as "Can I help you" or "There is a discount on last years' cards", but they could speak much more than that. It was more challenging to them since they need to add something new.*

In terms of what types of role-play they did in class, the students had

similar answers to their teachers'. For instance, Michael (G 8) grade said,

*The teacher gives us different role-plays in different classes. Mostly, she asks us to create a dialogue imitating the text we learn and asks us to act them out. Sometimes, we do more difficult ones. For instance, the teacher gives us a big topic "At the hospital." What we have to do is to act the roles as the doctor and patients and create a new dialogue.*

His classmate, Lucy added,

*This "Hospital" role-play is like a mini drama. It is more difficult but more interesting since we have more freedom to create new things. The role-play based on the sample dialogue on the text is just memorizing and retelling the text. We do not even need to use our mind and most of us are not interested in them.*

Lucy's excellent conclusion of varied levels of role-play showed that she

was aware of the differences between role-plays in terms of "difficulty" and

"freedom." The other students at lower grades (Grade7-8) interviewed had given

identical descriptions and they reported that their teacher used both easy and

difficult role-plays in class with different texts.

The students from higher grades (Grade 9-11) also used both easy and

difficult to categorize the role-playing types. What was different was the majority

of them reported their teachers more frequently used difficult role-play which was

"open-ended, more fun and challenging" (Lydia, G11). Only three students out of

18 claimed they were not satisfied with the role-play their teachers gave because

they thought they could finish more difficult tasks than those assigned by their teachers during role-plays. Alan (G9) hoped to do something that needs to be prepared before class.

### 4.1.2.2 Types of Role-play Observed in Class

I observed one or two classes of each teacher using role-play. What was worth noting is that most teachers believed that the role-plays they used were communicative since the students had to speak English in roles. To provide my readers with a fuller sense of what types of role-play teachers use at various grades, I would like to present the records of teachers' instructions and the students' performance at each grade.

#### Grade 7

#### Li

In her class teaching a leaflet from the South West of England, in the following up activities, Li first asked the students to read the text in different roles until they got familiar with the text and then instructed:

> *You meet some students from the South West of England in the summer camp. You are interested in their hometown and they want to know your hometown, too. Work in groups of 4 to act out the conversations. You have to use the words and phrases we have just learnt in the textbook but you can add something new when you talk about your own hometown.*

Li contended that such a role-play was demanding for her students at grade 7 whereas her students held different opinions. While the six students agreed this role-play was more than memorizing the text, they claimed it was not difficult and demanding because the roles and the situations were set before hand and they could use the given structures to describe the South West of England.

I observed some group's preparation of the role-play and noticed they all prepared their play rapidly. Nick commented: "This is a piece of cake and we don't need to think too much." His classmate Sky added: "Even though we had to introduce our hometown in English, since we were familiar with it, we did not need to use difficult English words to describe it." As shown from their performance, their role-play was based on the text they learnt and included all the structures they were required to use.

### Grade 8

### Wang

Coincidently, when I observed their classes, Wang and Lian were teaching the same text about two girls complaining to a boy named Bill Jones about the notice he put up to organize a football team only for boys. Nonetheless, the types of role-play they employed were not identical. After introducing the topic and new grammatical knowledge, Wang gave the following instruction to her students:

> *Work with two or three other students. What happened when Samantha, Rebecca, Blake and Steve went to talk to Bill Jones? Prepare and act out a conversation for the class.*

Wang commented this role-play as demanding and difficult because the students need to create new plots while using what they had learnt in classes.

I observed two of Wang's classes and in her other classes, she asked the students to role-play a short dialogue without any changes. She said she used such a role-play to have the students imitate the intonation and pronunciation in order to improve their oral English. Nevertheless, it seemed that her students did not know her purpose and they were not satisfied with the assigned task. Her student

Genius said: "The teacher enjoyed our performance of the given text and she thought that was interesting. However, we found it not fun enough because we had little freedom to add something new." His classmate, Joy smiled when she heard Genius's comment and she explained: "That's why we sometimes ignored the requirements and make some changes to make the role-play different and interesting." Her statement was reflected from the following lines taken from the first group's role-play:

*Narrator: This is the most powerful Emperor Alexander in Liberty Empire. Beside him is his most beautiful queen.*

No narration was provided in the text and most students laughed as the queen was acted by a boy.

### Lian

As they were teaching the same text, Lian's introduction of the text closely resembled Wang's. What was different was she managed to engage the students in various levels of role-plays. First, she asked the students to role-play the sample dialogue. Then, she had them guess what happened next. The following is a role-play script of one group's performance.

*G1: Hi, Bill Jones. We have great ideas for the poster*
*B1: What's wrong?*
*G2: Listen! Girls can play football as well as boys. We can organize a new team for everyone to choose*
*B1: Make your own team? Are you crazy?*
*G1: Central school has girl team and lots of schools have female football players.*
*G2: And many girls in our grades play football very well.*
*B2: That's true and the girls in the central school won loads of matches.*
*G1: Why don't we organize a football team for everyone to play?*
*B1: But I still think it is too dangerous for girls to play football with boys. I have a good idea.*

> *If you want to organize a team for everyone to play, you have to prove that you can play with boys. How about we organize a match between boys and girls to see if this can happen/*
> *B2: That's a good idea.*
> *G1+G2: That's great. Let's put up a new notice.*

The underlined part were the phrases required to be used, which were language points of that class. After performing such a kind of role-play, the students were asked to put up another notice after the conversation and they had to discuss in roles to decide what should be included in writing the notice. Lian gave the following instruction:

> *Let's suppose Bill Jones and his friends are disussing what should be written in the notice. Think of new slogans in the poster and use decorations to make the poster more attractive.*

After this activity, she gave students the most advanced role-play to do. The instruction was:

> *Think of any situation that you need to post a notice. First select any roles and discuss what should be included in the notice and how you can make your notice more outstanding from the others. Then write the notice in groups. I will present each group's work in front of the others.*

Due to time limit, she assigned that as homework. In the interview, she informed me that she intentionally incorporated different levels of role-playing activities to facilitate her students' English learning step by step. I found most students noticed her intention and they showed a preference to more open-ended role-plays which could be reflected from Viviane's comment on this specific class:

> *It is a pity that we did not have time for the most challenging activity. I can imagine how fun it would be.*

*Fang*

In his class teaching about slavery in the United States, Fang first asked the students to discuss the crime of slavery. Later, he offered them the scenario:

> *The slave masers caught the slaves who tried to escape. Make up a conversation between the slave masters and their slaves.*

He was confident that the role-play he gave was highly communicative on account of the fact that the students had freedom to interact in the target language based on the given scenario.

Here is the transcription of one role-play recorded in his class:

> *B1: Well, in this very short drama, we will show the cruelty of the European settlers.*
> *B2: We can't bear anymore. We are all humans but we do not have freedom. Where is justice?*
> *G1: We do not have rice. You are so cruel.*
> *G2: The rice is for me. You are all my slaves.*
> *The boy acting the master pretended that he shot one of the slaves complaining. The other students pretended that they were terrified.*
> *G2: Well, go to work or you will die.*
> *B1+B2+G1: Master, forgive us.*
> *G2: Go back to work or you will both end up like him.*

Most students participated actively in this role-play and the whole class enjoyed performing. Five out of the six students claimed they were satisfied with this type of role-playing and they denied it was a big challenge to them. Ivy mentioned that she loved this activity which motivated her to use her imagination and speak as much English as she could. Only one student Kevin held a different opinion:

> *I was at a loss when the teacher asked us to do this. I am more used to the type that we created something new based on the given sample. The role-play in this class is harder and we need more hints which is time consuming.*

*Grade 9*

*Ding*

In her class about superstition, Ding required the students to create a role-play based on given pictures about superstition in the world. It was worth addressing that she advised her students to compare the differences between Eastern and Western superstitions and also referred to their Chinese culture. The following lines were field notes taken for one group's performance:

> *This is a role-play group made up of three boys. One of them took the role of a black cat. The other two pretended to be an Egyptian and a European friend exchanging different attitudes according to the superstition about black cats in their culture. The boys made up the whole dialogue themselves only based on the given picture and short explanation of the differences. Their role-play was quite interesting.*

Alan, a boy who participated in this group commented that such a role-play helped him to learn cultural differences and it is also a very common role-play type used in his grade. Three out of six participants including Alan thought the role-play was not difficult while the other three thought it was a bit difficult and they could do better provided Ding gave them more specific explanations. The student Juliet argued that Ding could give them a sample role-play that they could imitate. On the contrary, her classmate Jimmy disagreed and mentioned that would limit their imagination.

*Grade 10*

*Kong*

Kong's class started with a role-play performance which was a daily implemented speaking activity organized by her. Her requirement of the activity was:

*Search interesting speaking materials abut celebrities in the world (movie characters, politicians, scientists…) and act their conversation. You can add new elements into their conversation. Form a group with your classmates and each group taken turns and we have one performance every day.*

The following was taken from my field notes about this activity:

*Two boys role-played the clown (the Joker) and Batman. It seems that role-play has been used very often in class. They were reading the drama script of the movie. (However, they paid too much attention to the intonation and pronunciation and they had no gestures, no facial expressions and it was not like a performance at all.*

Later in her class, she had the students to do a more advanced role-play. She offered them the scenario that one person had some problems and his/her friends try to understand the problems, identify advice and offer solutions. She provided them with a sample in which she acted as a wife complaining about her snoring husband and turned to a doctor for help. She then had the students design the role-plays and act without any limits. Kong told me that this role-play left students much freedom to communicate in English since she didn't set limits on the roles and the situation, which was also addressed by her students. Unlike the students from lower grades, all six students agreed they could perform this task easily and they did not need too much direction which might limit their imagination.

### 4.1.2.3 Findings & Analysis

*Role-playing types incorporated at various grades*

The findings regarding the teachers and students' understanding of role-play types they often used were in accord with the results for their role-play training and further proved that these teachers lack theoretical knowledge of role-play. Although they had used this technique for several years, they had little

idea of its classification. Nonetheless, through practical implementation, they had

noticed that role-play could be easy and difficult for their students depending on

the limits and requirements they gave. Li's identification of role-play types was

very similar to that put forward by Littlewood (1981) which divided role-play into

different groups in terms of "teacher-control and learner-creativity"(p.50). In fact,

the role-play classification Littlewood presented had appeared both in the

teachers' and students' description. To provide more links between the literature

and my research findings, I would like to restate Littlewood's classification

| Type | Teacher-control | Learner-creativity | Errors | SLA Approaches Reflected |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Memorized Dialogue | settings, roles, exact sentences | memorize sample dialogues | receive immediate correction | Audio-lingual |
| Contextualized Drills | settings, sentence Structures, roles | memorize sentence structures | receive immediate correction | Audio-lingual |
| Cue-dialogue | setting, meanings and forms, roles | respond in their own words in the given situation according to the meanings given | more errors are made and only receive correction after the dialogue is completed | CLT |
| Role-playing | setting, roles | dominate the whole interaction; create different plots and endings | more errors are made and only receive correction after the dialogue is completed | CLT |
| Improvisation | broad topic or setting | create the impromptu dialogue themselves | more errors are made and only receive correction after the dialogue is completed | CLT |

*Fig.14: Role-play & EFL orientation*

In reference to the data collected from direct classroom observations, I

provide the following tables which could provide more detailed information

regarding the levels of role-play being used in Chinese secondary school EFL

classes (at least at EFLS).

| General role-play types they always use | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Role-playing Type | Grade 7 Li | Grade 8 Wang | Grade 8 Lian | Grade 8 Fang | Grade 9 Ding | Grade 10 Kong | Grade 11 Huang |
| Memorizing Dialogues | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ | | | |
| Contextulized Drills | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ | | | |
| Cued-dialogue | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ | |
| Role-playing | | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ |
| Improvisation | | | ☺ | | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ |

*Fig.15: Role-play types always used*

| The role-play types observed in their classes | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Role-playing Type | Grade 7 | Grade 8 | Grade 8 | Grade 8 | Grade 9 | Grade 10 | Grade 11 |
| Memorizing Dialogues | ☺ | | ☺ | | | ☺ | |
| Contextulized Drills | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ | | | | |
| Cued-dialogue | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ | | | |
| Role-playing | | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ | | ☺ | ☺ |
| Improvisation | | | ☺ | | ☺ | ☺ | ☺ |

*Fig.16: Role-play types used in observed classes*

These data indicate that although there were many overlaps between

teachers' answers and role-play implementations, variations still appear at

different grades depending on teachers' backgrounds. Teachers teaching higher

grades used advanced level of role-plays more frequently and their students

reported less difficulty in completing the role-playing tasks.

For students at lower grades, the teachers started with a more structured

type and moved to more open-ended and demanding ones if time was sufficient.

However, it was worth noting that the more experienced teachers such as Lian were capable of integrating a variety of role-playing activities for her students.

No teacher doubted that the role-paying activities they conducted in class were communicative. Nonetheless, I had a different idea in terms of the degree of communication. For instance, in my view, Li's instruction on the "Leaflet" role-play and her students' performance revealed the features of an audio-lingual approach of teaching rather than communicative. Although the students did make some changes, the role-play given was based on the given structure and situation and their use of the language was limited. However, this kind of role-play was different from rigid retelling or reciting drills. The role-play contains communicative elements in that students could add plot elements in their dialogue. This also illustrates my view that the principles and activities of Audio-lingual and CLT sometimes overlapped.

Lian's role-play about discussing the new notice in the given roles was considered as communicative by her students and herself and the activity represents the feature of "social interaction activities" mentioned by Richard & Rodgers (1986), which was identified by Littlewood (1981) as one major category of communicative activities. What is worth mentioning is the activity she did was more advanced than the mechanical drills; though, it was still slightly different from the totally communicative ones because she still gave students the limits and the scenario that they had to discuss in the given roles. In my view, only the role-play of writing a totally new notice in any imagined roles and scenarios which she assigned as homework was highly communicative. Other highly communicative role-plays I observed included Ding's role-play about superstition

and Kong's role-play about problem solving, since the students interacted with each other in the target language and they had no requirements on roles and plots.

*Teachers' implementation of various role-playing types*

Makita (1995) contends that role-playing activities take several different forms and that the teacher should organize and employ role-play according to the students' needs, interests and levels. It could be inferred from the Figures in the previous section that teachers at various grades employed various levels of role-play types. The teacher at lower grades, just as Li emphasized tend to use more structured ones as their students' English proficiency level requires them to do so. Nevertheless, what was interesting was that although Lian, Wang and Fang were teaching the same grades, they had employed different types of role-play. For instance, in Lian's class, I realized that she employed at least three kinds of role-plays. The first activity she asked the students to act out the roles in the book and recite the dialogue was dialogue memorizing and the second activity was to guess what happened after the conversation in the text and create a dialogue while using the language points the students had just learnt. Next, she moved to more open-ended tasks by asking the students to discuss in the role of characters to put up a new notice which to me is much like role-playing and then she assigned the homework and asked the student to think of any roles and discuss how to write a new notice, which turned out to be the improvisation which only offered the students a broad topic or scenario. Lian, among the three was more trained for using role-play and she successfully integrated both structured and open-ended role-plays to meet her students' needs.

Wang and Fang only used one role-play in their classes. Wang explained she only used one owning to time limit and Fang told me that was because the students had already been familiar with the text from the previous lesson and they were capable of doing more open-ended ones. Most of their students agreed with them. However, some students still thought it would be better if they could be provided with more instruction.

As mentioned earlier, Lian was much more experienced than Wang and Fang, and she had recently completed the M.Ed. program which offered her opportunity to take courses on English teaching trends. Hence, she knew the differences between Audio-lingual and CLT and her understanding of role-play types was deeper than that of the other teachers. In addition, her description of the role-play "Bill Jones" informed me that she was good at using both easy and difficult role-plays at the same time. She first engaged the students in the activities that belong to the audio-lingual one and then move to the more open-ended CLT style role-play. Her story showed that the more experienced and educated the teachers were, the more skilled they were at conducting different types of role-playing activities. Moreover, it demonstrates that, if effectively implemented, various levels of role-playing activities could facilitate the students' learning step by step.

*Students' performance of various types of role-plays*

To my surprise, though most students from grade 7 are at the beginner's level, the role-plays their teachers used were as advanced as those implemented with higher grades. Furthermore, a vast number of students at lower grades were willing and able to do highly communicative role-plays and they believe this

could improve their oral English as well as their imagination and creativity. The observation of their role-playing performance also supported their opinion. Kong told me that she did this role-play because the text was easy to understand and also because she had found her students' English had made more progress than before. Fang said from the classroom performance his students had done in this semester, he believed they were able to do more open-ended role-plays. This information has challenged my assumption that students at lower grades would prefer easier tasks and they would lose motivation if they were asked to do too much. In fact, I had experienced some reluctance on the part of my students to do more advanced role-plays myself. Therefore, I used to believe that beginners are not yet accustomed to speaking and listening to English even when they have a great deal of grammatical knowledge or a wide vocabulary. For students at this level, easier tasks are more proper than the open-ended ones (Sato, 2002). Obviously, Li and Wang shared my assumption and they gave the limited choices in the role-play their classes performed. However, Li's students at Grade 7 were not satisfied with the limited choices they had and they expressed their willingness to do more challenging and real communicative role-plays. As shown from their performance, they made attempts to make the role-play more difficult and interesting, which indicated that Li had underestimated her students' ability and needs. She could use more flexible role-play with her students in grade 7.

While students at the beginner's level prefer the implementation of more advanced and communicative role-plays, the students at higher levels emphasized their needs to "imagine and to create" (George, G9). While observing their classes, I was overwhelmed by their imagination and excellent performance. Such

a phenomenon challenged Hines's (1978) view that "a teacher-written skit with repeated use of a structure which has been presented and practiced is one of the best role-playing activities for beginning and intermediate students"(p.127). The classroom observation and interviews indicated that the ability of students at beginning and intermediate levels should be reconsidered and teachers might employ more advanced role-plays with students at the two levels.

Even so, it was important to note that a number of students thought that they would do better in class with more time and support. Their claim suggested that the students' reluctance and unsatisfactory performance of more open-ended communicative role-play might probably be due to the lack of time and support given by teachers instead of their incapability. Their remarks together with my past experience suggested that the students' reluctance and unsatisfactory performance of more advanced role-plays probably result from the lack of time and support. This supports Omaggio-Hadley's (1993) view that language educators should take a flexible approach to teaching and designing activities responsive to learner needs and preferences (p.118).

### 4.1. 3 Role-play Materials & Course Types

### 4.1.3.1 Teachers' & Students' Descriptions

According to the data collected, I realized that the role-play technique was used with diverse course materials and incorporated into different class types at EFLS. The textbooks they used were different from those used in ordinary schools, as the text books were EFL teaching materials published from English-speaking countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia. The textbooks contained abundant topics and communicative materials. All seven

teachers believe that those textbooks were more interactive and student-centered than the traditional Chinese curriculum.

The school where these teachers taught used a set of textbooks among which New Horizons in English (NHE) was used for every grade. Consequently, teachers gave me similar descriptions of the topics and materials they used. Huang wrote that "this textbook had an excellent selection of diverse topics including daily-life conversations, scientific reports, or interviews with experts in different fields." The other teachers' description corresponded with her comment.

With regard to whether the materials are easy to create role-plays, teachers held divergent opinions. Lian said "most of the materials were flexible, communicative and easy to create role-plays, no matter if they are conversation texts or reading materials." Ding remarked that it is easy to design and incorporate role-plays with speaking materials while it is not that easy to do role-play with the listening and reading materials. Wang also mentioned that he did not like to do role-play with difficult texts such as the introduction of different careers because it contained more grammar and jargon which might be too difficult for her students to do role-play with. Wang gave me the following example:

> *For instance, there was a reading material about saving the world and improving its environment. For my students at Grade 8, there were many new words about the environment such as the acid rain, oxygen and pollution. Moreover, the grammatical structure was difficult. I expected the students didn't have much interest in such a scientific text, so I only asked them to memorize the text and then role-play a scientist and introduce what was in the text to the whole class in the role. I found my students were not interested in participating and I found it is hard to create a communicative role-play for them.*

Coincidentally enough, her students mentioned the same role-play when asked about what kind of topic they did. Claris said:

*I think we have lots of topics to do role-play. We even did a role-play on the text about control pollution and saving the earth. I remember Miss Wang only asked us to act as a scientist and retell the text in the role.*

Another student, Tony interrupted her and added:

*However, that role-play was not interesting. It was no more than reciting and retelling the text. I think if the teacher had asked us to act as different roles ourselves, (for instance, a scientist, a reporter that interviews the scientist or and residents in other planets), the role-play would have been more interesting and helpful for us to memorize the text content.*

While teachers seemed satisfied with the diversity of topics and materials of role-play, their students expressed a different opinion. The students in grade 7 to 9 showed a preference to do role-play with the material selected from fables, fairy tales and even Disney cartoons besides their text books. The students from grade 10 to 11 wanted to try more difficult and formal materials which placed more demands on the teachers. The following quotation comes from Rich (G11)'s answers in the questionnaire:

*Since we are in grade 11 and will face the National College Entrance Exam (NCEE) soon, we want to improve all aspects of our English, especially the grammar and vocabulary. Therefore, we want to do role-play with more difficult materials. I do hope that our teachers can offer us more diverse and integrated materials to arouse our interests in role-play and consolidate our knowledge. So far, I find most role-plays in class are interesting, but sometimes I think the materials are too easy.*

Jennifer (G11) even proposed that teachers employ role-play with difficult materials to teach grammar, which, as mentioned by her teacher Huang and her classmates were hard and unnecessary.

Rich and Jennifer placed more demands on teachers and suggested not to limit the use of role-play to speaking materials. Their answers made me continue to question what type of classes the teachers could use role-play and what type of materials are used with different types of class.

While being asked in what type of classes role-play could be used, different teachers gave different opinions. Li, Lian, Ding, and Kong claimed that role-play could be used in any type of class. Li even mentioned that it was hard to distinguish different class types because the objectives of their EFL classes were integrated with improvement of the four commonly emphasized language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Huang said that role-play could be used with any type other than a grammar course, while Kong argued that role-play could be used to teach grammar independently and she would try that later. She explained:

> *I used to observe a teacher using role-play to teach the students the Subjunctive Mood. He set a series of interesting scenarios for students and asked them to use the grammar structure and practice in different roles. I found his class interesting and motivating and as a result, most students grasped the grammar points quickly and easily.*

Although most teachers agree that role-play could be used with any materials in any classes, six out of the seven participants think it is comparatively easier to use role-play with listening and speaking materials and it is harder to teach writing by role-play. Lian held a different opinion and she thought role-play could also play its role in writing as long as it was being effectively used.

When the students were asked to summarize their class types, most students from grade 7 to 8 were confused. As an illustration of this, Tom (G7) depicted:

> *I think we need to speak, listen and read in every English class. Besides, we have particular oral classes taught by native English teachers. In those classes, we do not have textbooks. The teachers find whatever materials they like to motivate us to speak.*

His classmates added that what they did in oral classes was mostly group discussion and open-ended role-plays. This suggests that the students had developed a sense that the learning of English is a process and can not be learned independently. The students from grade 10 to 11 also noticed comprehensive teaching objectives of their classes; however, they noticed that there was a heavy emphasis on the grammar instruction and explanation during class and as Lydia wrote in her questionnaire:

> *Our class integrates a variety of activities including speaking, listening, reading and writing. Much time is spent on grammar explanation before we do any activities. Role-play is more used with the reading materials and speaking materials.*

### 4.1.3.2 The Topics & Materials Used in the Classes Observed

It could be concluded from the interviews that a great diversity of materials were used for role-play at the school based on the textbook. In this section, I would like to provide the materials used in the classes observed to offer first hand information to my readers.

#### Grade 7

#### Li

The material Li used for her class was a tour leaflet of South East England. I was informed later by Li that the passage was taken from the complementary exercise-book to the textbook she used. It was designed to practice students' reading and speaking skills. After the content of the text, there were reading comprehension exercises and follow-up discussion topics.

*Grade 8*

*Wang & Lian*

The same material that Wang and Lian used was an argument between boys and girls about whether girls should join the school football team and the follow up activities in the material includes notice writing and discussion on gender differences. Apparently, such a material was designed to promote learning for integrated English skills including speaking, listening and writing. However, it was interesting to note that Wang did not use role-play to teach the writing part as Lian did.

*Fang*

The text Fang employed in his class was a passage introducing slavery in American history. The text included several units including discussion on cruelty of slavery, tape listening on the slave's stories. The course emphasized on reading and speaking.

*Grade 9*

*Ding*

As Ding explained in her interview, "the major goal of this class is to

teach students that different cultures have different superstitions and improve their listening and speaking skills of the target language." Interestingly, her class was an integrated class which emphasized culture.

*Grade 10*

*Kong*

It could be inferred from the text that the major teaching objective of the class was to enhance the students' English speaking and problem-solving skills, though Kong and her students unanimously categorized this class as a speaking class.

### *4.1.3.3 Findings & Analysis*

#### ***Materials and class types for role-play at various grades***

The data achieved indicated that role-play was used by the teachers with diverse materials in various types of classes. Nearly every piece of material used was taken directly from the Western content-based textbooks used among foreign languages schools in China. As introduced by the teachers and students, the textbooks contained diverse materials and topics varying from daily life conversations to scientific studies. In addition, the materials were in different literary forms. Some were monologues, some were letters, and some were news reports. However, all the materials and text books were published in native English speaking countries and as a result, they immersed the students with the western culture with little references into the Chinese culture.

Figure 17 is based on the observation of each class which best illustrates materials and class types for role-play at various grades

Materials and Class types for role-play at various grades

| Grade | Material | Topic | Course Type | Educational Purpose |
|-------|----------|-------|-------------|---------------------|
| 7 | Leaflet for traveling | Daily life , geography | integrated | Reading, speaking, listening, (introducing a new place) |
| 8 | Gender issue | Social life | integrated | Reading, speaking, listening, writing a new notice, having an argument |
| 8 | Gender issue | Social life | integrated | Reading, speaking, listening, writing a new notice, having an argument |
| 8 | Slavery in America | History, Politics | integrated | Reading and speaking, acting |
| 9 | Superstition | Culture | integrated | Reading, speaking, listening, cross-cultural awareness |
| 10 | Problem solving | Daily life | integrated | Reading, speaking, listening, problem-solving |

*Fig.17: Role-play materials & course types*

As Figure 17 demonstrates, a great variety of materials and topics were used in the classes observed and there were no major differences between the materials and topics used for various grades except that more grammar points were contained in the materials for higher grades which required the teachers to have more instruction and warm-up activities before the use of role-play for the materials.

I was amazed at such a result because I had assumed that for the students at lower grades, most materials would be daily life conversations. I thought that only students from higher grades would have more formal and intensive reading materials concerning social, scientific or political issue. Nonetheless, the study results made it clear that the set of NHE textbooks they used was carefully designed and even the students from lower grades would have materials for

diverse issues including political, historical, and scientific issues which were generally thought difficult to teach at that grade level. Those data informed me that most of the students could also grasp the gist of those materials and perform role-plays based on the materials if role-play was effectively designed and used.

Like the material used to do role-play, the students at various grades also have very similar course types. Though teachers such as Kong and Huang mentioned that their classes emphasized grammar since their students would take the NCEE soon, most of the other class types were integrated because a variety of tasks including speaking, listening, and writing were designed by the materials and the students need to fulfill all these tasks during class. The result has supported Xu & Huang's (2003) analysis of current Chinese EFL teaching trends showing that promising course books with a focus on communicative competence have emerged which outlines the goal of language teaching as integrated skills training instead of single skills development.

Furthermore, concluded from different materials and class types described and observed, Enright and McCloskey's (1998) Integrated Language Teaching (ILT) Model was addressed at the school and role-play was used within the model. The answers from the students at various levels regarding what types of role-plays they did suggests that they had developed a sense that the learning of English is a process and can not be accomplished independently. Therefore, my study supported the rationale of ILT and the use of role-play with students at various language proficiency levels to promote ILT.

*Teachers' role-play implementation with different class types & materials*

Apparently, the teachers were satisfied with the diversity of topics and materials in the textbooks. However, they had different opinions on how to use role-play with these materials and some teachers addressed the problems of using different materials. Teachers such as Li and Lian thought they could organize role-play with materials in any field as long as they carefully designed the activity and offer the students clarified instructions. On the contrary, Wang and Fang addressed their difficulty in conducting role-plays with certain topics and materials such as scientific research studies with many grammar points and jargon. Huang stated that she needed more time for grammar instruction before doing role-play as the materials of grade 11 were more difficult.

As mentioned earlier, these teachers had different educational and professional backgrounds. Accordingly, their skills in handing role-play with difficult materials and topics were different. For instance, although there were lots of new words in the superstition text, Ding managed to have students choose any roles and present the differences between superstition in different cultures after detailed instruction and preparation. The students performed well in that class. On the contrary, Wang did a less satisfactory job in her "pollution" class. From her students Claris and Tony's comment of "Saving the earth" role-play, I found that Wang assigned students the role as the scientist to introduce the scientific materials in an interesting way. However, the students only performed one given role and the monologue was more like retelling. It was actually an Audio-lingual activity. She said she did this because she found her students reluctant to do role-play with difficult and boring texts. Nonetheless, as shown from her students'

comment, the students were willing to create a role-play even with difficult and boring text if it was well designed and with more interesting roles. For instance, Tony mentioned that the teacher could have students play the roles of various residents of different planets discussing pollution in that role-play. His suggestion underlined the need for teachers to use imagination and broaden their views on role selection for their students according to different texts. Ding and Wang's story showed that even a difficult role-play could be conducted successfully by students if it was well designed, considering students' interest and the difficulty of the provided materials.

It was noticeable that although grade 8 students are mostly at the beginner level, the majority of them were willing to use diverse topics out of the text books. One student even proposed that the teacher give them whatever topic they wanted, which showed the students' willingness to perform more open-ended and communicative role-play. This challenged the traditional view that a beginner of English should only be given a more audio-lingual style of role-play; otherwise they would lose motivation (Makita 1995; Maxwell 1997). The disaccord between the information from the interview and the literature demonstrated a need for teachers to rethink their perception on what kind of role-play materials their students at the beginner level need and would be capable of using.

While most teachers told me that role-play could be incorporated to enhance students' integrated skills, the collected information demonstrates that reading and speaking materials were used more frequently than the others. I double-checked with the teachers about this after the two interviews and they confirmed such a finding. This suggested that Chinese EFL teachers integrated

role-play into limited themes of English classes (speaking and reading), and the materials they used were mainly related to those two skills. According to Maxwell (1997), role-play could also be used with listening and writing materials and she provided detailed examples on how Japanese teachers used role-play with different materials to improve their students' different abilities. In my view, her research was valuable and Chinese EFL teachers should consult her research and become more innovative for their implementation.

***Possibility of using role-play to facilitate students' intercultural awareness***

In my role as a social-cultural researcher, I take particular interest in how role-play could be incorporated to promote intercultural awareness. Through my study, I noticed that the text books at EFLS were western content based with little reference to the participants' native culture. Despite this fact, I excitedly noticed that when teachers asked the students to discuss the topic, some of them referred to their own culture. For instance, Li asked her students to introduce their hometown to the foreign guests while Ding advised her students to address superstition in the Chinese culture in their role-plays. According to the comments of Ding's students, they welcomed the teacher's integrating cultural elements into their classes. The cases also supported Scarcella and Crookall's (1992) view that "language and culture are intertwined. It is difficult to teach one fully without the other," which definitely laid a strong practical rational for the teaching of students' intercultural awareness during language classes.

According to Byram and Fleming (1998), intercultural awareness is central to the expansion of communicative competence which involves an understanding not only the culture of the language being studied but also the

learners' own culture. Though Ding did not read their works, she laid emphasis on teaching different cultures and she identified the major purpose of her class as to practice the students' listening and promote their understanding of superstition in different cultures. She asked the students to compare the different superstitions between Eastern and Western cultures and advised them to include Chinese superstition in their role-plays. The first group's performance about different attitudes toward black cats from the perspective of an Egyptian and a British person demonstrated that they had developed an intercultural awareness of superstition. All performances were interesting and creative, which supported my assumption that role-play, if effectively implemented, could be an excellent way to implement the culturally responsive teaching model (CRCLT) that I proposed.

### 4.1.4 Effectiveness of Role-play in EFL Teaching

### 4.1.4.1 Teachers' and Students' Descriptions

All participants were in complete agreement and gave positive comments on role-play as an effective technique for EFL teaching and learning. All seven teachers agreed that "the major advantage of this technique was to motivate students to learn in different meaningful contexts" (Li) and "offered them a comfortable environment to learn in play-like activities". (Kong).

Students in grades 7 to 8 unanimously agreed with their teachers that the major effectiveness of role-play was to motivate them to communicate in the target language with less pressure. Just as Nick (G7) stated:

> *Role-play is fun in that we can use our imagination to create our play and also practice the grammar knowledge we have learnt in class. It makes our English class lively and interesting.*

Juliet (G9) made a more explicit comment:

> *Role-play gives us different situations and requires us to speak in different roles. Thus, we can practice what is learnt in daily life situations.*

Teachers also mentioned that role-play could improve students' non-verbal behaviour such as logic (Huang), interpersonal relationship (Lian) and cultural awareness (Ding & Lian). Similar comments were also reflected from students' discussions. For instance, Lucy (G8) added:

> *If we can do more advanced and flexible role-plays, we can learn to organize our language and develop the plots according to different situations. Role-play can help us to improve such abilities besides English skills.*

To my surprise, though only from grade 8, Lucy had noticed the effectiveness of role-play to improve other non-verbal behaviours. It was apparent that even the students from lower grades noticed that while role-play was fun and like a game, it had educational purpose and they could learn more from role-playing.

Annie (G7) said:

> *In a game, we have to obey the rules and just have fun. But in a role-play, we have a lot of things to do such as choose what to say according to different roles and situations.*

Her classmate Tom added:

> *Games are just like play and they are not very helpful to grasp knowledge. Role-play is designed to grasp knowledge.*

The students from higher grades were more aware of the effectiveness of role-play in improving their non-verbal behaviours and emphasized that role-play helped them to improve their culture awareness (Alan, G9), interpersonal relationship (James, G8) performing skills on the stage (Bill & Polly, G10), imagination and creativity (students from various grades). Alan praised Ding's

superstition class and he told me he not only learnt common superstition in different cultures, but also knew more about superstition in Chinese culture through discussion and role-plays. I further explain these advantages in the following Findings and Analysis section.

### 4.1.4.2 The Effectiveness of Role-play in the Classes Observed

The major advantages of role-play on motivating students to learn vocabulary and grammar as well as practising their oral English were clearly shown in the two classes observed. For instance, the following is the vocabulary and grammar knowledge that appeared in the text Fang used:

> *Words: slave, slavery, property, punish*
> *Phrases: live in bad conditions, receive minimal amounts of food, be*
> *treated badly; be punished hard.*
> *Grammar requirement: review the passive voice and past tense*
> According to Fang's requirement for the role-play, the students had to take

roles as slaves and slave masters and create a dialogue. He required the students to list in their dialogue the new words and emphasized grammar in their discussion and role-plays. During the preparation stage, some of students referred to the words and phrases on the text again before they spoke to ensure they used all the required structures in their role-plays. Such phenomenon showed that they understood that the purpose of the role-play was to practice and consolidate their knowledge of the text. The following is taken from one group's performance in Fang's class:

> *B1: This drama will show you the cruelty of <u>slave</u> masters.*
> *B2: What are you three doing?*
> *G1: We are looking after her. She <u>receives minimal amounts of food</u>. She*
> *needs some rice to eat.*
> *B2: The rice is for me. You are all my slaves.*
> *G2: You are so cruel. The <u>slavery</u> is so cruel. We don't know why we <u>live</u>*
> *<u>in very bad conditions</u> and <u>are treated very badly</u>.*

> *B1: Yes. We are not your <u>property</u>. You can not force us to work for you.*
> *B2: You are my <u>property</u> and you have to go to work. It cost me much to buy you and you have to work for me.*

The underlined parts were the structures from the text books that the students used in the dialogue.

In Fang's class, the majority of students were excited at the role-play assignment and they started to prepare in groups immediately. To my interest, the audience as well as the actors and actress frequently burst out laughing during the performance. Obviously, they had a lot of fun throughout the activity. Ivy the girl who pretended to be the master whipping her slaves said:

*We always laugh when we do role-play because we shouldn't worry that the teachers may get angry with our mistakes. He seldom interrupts us and corrects our mistakes when we play our roles. We can speak and perform as we like. You see that I pretended that I was whipping the slaves. I love to add some new plots to cheer the audience. How exciting this is!*

Her answer corresponded with Alan (G9):

*I know why my classmates laughed when we performed. This was because they saw my body language in the role-play. I had fun in using body language to make them laugh and I was happy to see they were amused by my performance.*

The situation was similar in other classes. What was different was that the classes using higher levels of role-play not only encouraged the students to use the newly learnt vocabulary and grammar points, but to motivate them to use what they had learnt in the past and to use words that they did not know how to say in English yet. Let's take Kong's class as an example of this: The new words and phrases in her class were:

*Words: snore, snorer, brainstorm*
*Phrases: quit doing something; identify the problem, problem-solving*
*skills*
*Grammar requirement: review the present tense and the gerund*

After the warming-up stage, Kong had her students do the improvisation with only the given scenario: solving the problems for the others. Her students need to identify various problems that people will face in their daily lives and need to use more English words other than the given vocabulary. For instance, one group used the learnt words and created a scenario about an astronomer who could not fly back to the earth and asked for help. Another group created a scenario about a geologist who wanted to stop a bursting volcano and they referred to the electronic dictionary about the word "volcano" which they did not know how to say in English. Thus, we could see that the role-playing activities served as a bridge to link the students past and present knowledge, and encourage them to grasp new knowledge beyond their course books.

Besides the major advantages the teachers and students agreed upon, I found role-play was also effective in other aspects in real classrooms. For example, it greatly stimulated the students' imagination by offering them freedom to add new plots. I had observed how the three boys prepared the role-play in Fang's class and I noticed that they disagreed on role selection at first. All boys of the group wanted to be the slave master and they argued for quite a while. However, interestingly, they worked out this problem by using the game "Stone, scissors, and cloth" and let the winner be the master. In addition, I found a great number of students made notes on the important lines for different roles and the development of the plots. It was noticeable that this draft-writing technique was

widely used among the groups at various grades. Nevertheless, teachers from lower grades sometimes reminded their students to make notes while students from higher grades seemed to have already had formed a habit of using the technique. All this showed that role-play had helped the students to improve their cooperation and communication competence as well as other skills such as note-taking or draft-writing.

Three teachers pointed out another advantage of role-play which was to help each students develop the role awareness. Huang maintained that through the discussion of the text in various roles with different profession, the students could consolidate their knowledge of different professions by thinking of scenarios in which they played different roles with different professions. She argued that by doing this, her students could develop a general sense of the differences between roles and professions. Such an advantage could be seen obviously from the first group's performance in Fang's class. Ivy (G8) who acted the master pretended she was whipping the slaves, which indicated that the students had a general sense of what people of different roles and professions should do and what their reactions might be.

### 4.1.4.3 Findings and Analysis

When I did the literature review, I found most of the current literature emphasized the effectiveness of role-play in oral classes and regarded it as a form of speaking activity. However, according to Maxwell (1997), role-play could be integrated into many themes and/or content-based lessons while being a fun and creative way for learners to practice and/or improve verbal and non-verbal communication (p.2). My research findings corresponded with her view and

therefore, I will report and analyze the advantages of role-play in improving students' verbal and non-verbal behaviors.

*Role-play and students' verbal behavior and four language skills*

The interviews and classroom observations corresponded with the findings of my master's thesis and further supported my research hypothesis that role-play had a place in EFL classes. Alber and Foil (2003) maintained that dramatic activities may help to teach/and or consolidate vocabulary. Such a view has been reinforced by EFL classes observed when using role-play where the students consolidated and reviewed their verbal knowledge such as vocabulary, sentence patterns and grammar by playing different roles with different scenarios. By relating the knowledge to their daily life, they acquired and practiced their knowledge visually and aurally, and they incorporated the language context into their memory.

Most teachers and students agree that role-play was fun and motivating since it offers them meaningful contexts for learning. This was in line with a good many researchers' views that as the essence of all dramatic activities, role-play was used with the principle that "drama directly involves the child and an involved child would be interested in learning" (Smith, 1972). The cases also confirmed Makita's (1995) view that the use of different types of role-playing activities enables the teacher to provide students with the opportunity to practise the target language in a variety of meaningful contexts. This supported the view that dramatic activities may help to teach/and or consolidate vocabulary (Alber & Foil, 2003).

According to Scarcella and Crookall (1990), simulation is effective in improving the four language skills. As role-play is widely recognized as simulation, I found many similarities between its advantages and those of simulation. Seen from the interviews and classroom observations, role-play definitely helped the students with their four language skills, though to different extents. Most students noticed role-play was useful for their oral English, including listening and speaking, as they had to talk to each other in meaningful contexts. In their classes, role-play compensated for the limitations of the traditional teacher-dominated language classroom and provided the students with a variety of conversational models between different roles, and changes the class to student-centered. By practicing within different roles, the students experienced a variety of speech acts which they would not achieve in a traditional class.

It was also worth addressing that the majority of groups wrote drafts of the plots and the dialogues of their role-play, which indeed helped them to practice their writing skills. As for reading skills, the students did not have direct practice in role-play; however, before they did role-play, they had to read and understand the materials before they could use elements from it. In addition, by doing role-play based on the text, they had a deeper impression on what they had read. For instance, Fang's students had to understand the text on slavery before they could discuss it. After the discussion, they could understand the content better and, thus, their reading skills had been used. Hence, role-play was found to be effective in promoting students' four language skills including listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which showed that role-play, if effectively implemented could be used for the Integrated Language Teaching Model (ILT) (Enright &

McCloskey, 1998). Nevertheless, the results suggested that role-play was more effective in improving oral skills rather than reading and writing.

*Role-play and students' non-verbal behaviours*

Unanimously, students from various grades pointed out that role-play could improve other abilities necessary for learning, which was consistent with Sharn's opinion that "role-playing can be used effectively to improve skills needed for the language process rather than simply being a technique for exploring content" (p.182.). Lucy (G8) noticed that role-play helped her learn to organize the language and stimulate her imagination while Ted (G11) found it was effective to improve her logical skills.

Moreover, as I observed in Fang's class, the students could improve their communication and cooperation skills by doing role-play as well. For example, the boys in the group used a game to solve their disagreement over role-selection, which showed their skills in negotiating with each other and developing good human relation. Besides, Fang and Huang mentioned that the students gradually developed their role awareness. Based on Fang's students acting as slave master, it could be concluded that role-play could bring home to the students some aspects of behaviour and speech of different roles, and it clearly promoted effective interpersonal relations and social transactions among participants.

The students also mentioned that they had fun in thinking of amusing body language related to the roles they played in doing role-play (Ivy, G8 & Alan, G9). This had demonstrated that while doing role-play, the students had the opportunity to try non-verbal interaction by using body language.

Damon (1986) grouped non-verbal behaviours into three categories: paralanguage (tone of voice), kinesics (body movement), and proxemics (non-verbal behavior such as the use of space and manipulation of objects exemplifies) (reviewed by Maxwell, 1997, p.3). I would add one other category, intercultural awareness. Kodotchigova (2001) maintained that role-play can be very effective for experiencing cultural awareness if teachers effectively incorporate teaching culture into role-play implementation. Based on the classroom practice, we could conclude that role-play did function to improve students' cultural behaviour. For example, in different classes observed, the students interacted with each other in a variety of settings, such as at school, in the factory, in space, or at a tour site in Nanjing. Role-plays offered them a good opportunity to deal with a range of culturally sensitive areas such as greetings, apologies, and self-introductions relevant to these different life settings in their dialogues. Moreover, as seen in Kong and Fang's class, role-plays armed the students with an increased role-awareness and made them better prepared for free interdisciplinary communication in the target language (Tyers, 2002, p.165). The classroom practice of role-play was consistent with Kodotichgova's (2001) claim that role-play is one way of co-teaching second language and second language culture and it could be used for my proposed Culturally Responsive Communicative Teaching (CRCLT) model for EFL education.

It was important to notice that all teachers claimed they used role-play in a communicative way. Since communicative competence is the final goal of a communicative teaching approach, throughout this analysis I paid attention to role-play's effectiveness in grammatical competence, socio-linguistic

competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and intercultural competence (Canale & Swain, 1999) as they were considered as the components of the newly expanded communicative competence. I was happy to find that the data analysis presented above strongly supported that role-play was instrumental in improving the five aspects of communicative competence in class, though to varying degrees.

### 4.1.5 Problems with Role-play Implementation in Classrooms & Related Solutions

### 4.1.5.1 Teachers' & Students' Descriptions

While all participants confirmed that role-play was a helpful techinique in EFL classrooms, they listed a number of problems they had encountered in class.

Similar problems were mentioned by the teachers. Six out of the seven mentioned that they sometimes had difficulty controlling the class when the students became too excited and made much noise. Besides, some groups only paid attention to their own performance, and they prepared their role-play and talked loudly while the others were performing. To solve the problem of classroom chaos, different teachers had different solutions. Wang said she had to stop the students several times to keep them under control but it took extra time and did not always succeed. More experienced teachers such as Li and Ding told me that they always tried to choose exciting topics so that all the performances might be interesting and the students would pay more attention to the others' performances. Li also tried to give students time limits for their role-play to keep the activity short so that she could better control the class. She found the two solutions effective in her class. Lian, Kong and Huang mentioned that they had clear guidelines for students to do role-play and included the role-play marks in

their final grades. Alternatively, Fang, the male teacher thought noise was not a big problem as it sometimes indicated the students were involved in the discussion and practise their speaking. Lian's comment corresponded with Fang's, but she emphasized that the teacher should distinguish noise from sound and ensure that the students' discussion was related to their texts.

Teachers and students also side that time limit was another common problem which they felt hard to deal with because of the time limit of each class and because of so many tasks they need to finish during one class (Juliet, G9) found it hard to give every group the chance to perform in one class. Li mentioned that it was hard to have every group perform in class, and Lian stated that she could not use as many role-play types as she had expected due to the shortness of time.

Another common problem stated by the teachers was the lack of interest or willingness to do role-play by some students. Wang explained:

> *Some students keep quiet and do not participate in the role-play and I can't force them to do it. Moreover, I find if I use a difficult and flexible role-play, some students whose English are not as good as their peers will have trouble doing the activity and the teaching objectives can not be achieved with those "non-streamed" students.*

Wang identified the reason for this was because those students' English proficiency was poor and most of these students were transformed from other schools into EFLS and were not familiar with the role-play types. Consequently, they could hardly understand her instruction correctly Her comment was challenged by her student Joy during the focus group discussion:

> *Some classmates lack interest in participating in role-play because of their own personality. They were just too shy to perform in front of the*

*others. Some other classmates did not have sufficient training of role-play because they had transformed from the other school where role-play was not commonly used. I believe they would do better if they were encouraged by the teachers.*

Ding, Kong and Huang also mentioned the problem of students'

unwillingness and the failure to convey some teaching objectives in the interview.

However, they listed different reasons. Ding argued that it was because of too

many tasks to be completed in one class which deprived the students' interests

and energy of role-playing activities. When asked what caused such problems,

Lian answered that was because of the educational system placed priority on

written English instead of speaking. As an effect, some parents did not want their

children to waste time on role-plays. She thought it might be a good idea to

include the marks of role-play in the final mark to solve the problem. Kong and

Huang stated that since the students of their grades had been using role-play for at

least three years, they were too familiar with teachers' tricks and it was hard to

stimulate their interest with a repeatedly used technique. Most students agreed

with their opinion and they expressed the importance of doing more open-ended

role-plays with more challenging tasks and materials. Huang's student Ted added

that as students facing NCEE, he thought the explicit grammar instruction is more

important than role-playing and it is not necessary to use role-play in every class.

Li and Fang pointed out sometimes time and climate would have negative

effect on students' motivation in participating in role-play. They told me that if

the English class was the first class after the lunch break or right after a physical

education course, many students would become less involved as they were too

tired or too sleepy. The students at various grades agreed with them and Yuki

(G11) added another reason:

> *Sometimes I do not want to participate was not only because we were tired, but also because of our mood. If there was an important exam approaching, I would worry about it all day and become less devoted in the play.*

Yuki suggested the teacher avoid doing role-play at that period of time and carry

out o stimulating warm-up activity to "wake them up".

The "overemphasis of role-play problem" identified by Kong had aroused

my attention. Kong mentioned that the school encouraged and sometimes even

force the teachers to use role-play. In every public demonstration classes,

role-play was a major technique. The school always held teaching competitions

between teachers and the marking committee paid more attention to teachers' use

of role-play instead of other procedures or techniques in class. This led to the

artificial and rigid procedure of classes, always an introduction part leading to the

role-play with little innovations. Kong suggested that role-play be used

interchangeably with other communicative activities.

Interestingly, more than half of the students at various grades told me that

they noticed their teachers had tried to solve the problems of noise and lack of

interest to participate. They all argue that their teachers' efforts helped to control

the problem of noise. In terms of the other problem, students had different

opinions. Wang's student Joy was not satisfied with her support and she thought

she could offer more support to those "non-stream" students to solve the

problems. Interestingly enough, two of Wang's other students argued that their

teacher was already too busy and insisted that the students themselves had to take

the responsibility. Moreover, when I continued to ask them if there were some shy students who performed well in role-play and surprised the others in class as role-play gave them the opportunity to express themselves, none of the students gave me a positive answer. Their answers unfold the fact that it is hard to change the students' personality and force them to participate.

The situation was a little different in Lian and Kong's class. All their students claimed that they had noticed their teachers made attempts to help those students and they commented that the attempts were effective, more or less. Only one student, Lillian mentioned that Li tried to put the shy students into more active groups, but they still kept silent most of the time. Moreover, Li, Lian and Fang's students did not think this problem was serious in class because only one or two students kept silent in class and most of the students were interested in the activity.

Through comparison between the teachers' and students' comments, I found that some problems were not noticed by the teachers but were mentioned by their students. For instance, Li's student Sky mentioned:

> *When we prepare role-play, sometimes we argue with each other on how to design the plots and assign roles. It takes us a lot of time to settle the argument.*

Such a problem could be seen in observation of Fang's class which is presented in the next section.

Wang's students from grade 8 addressed more problems. Angela said:

> *We can improve our oral English by doing role-play, however, we can not improve our grammar knowledge as much as speaking and listening because when we speak in a role-play, we speak very fast and the teacher can not find all the mistakes that we have made. I think it can not directly help me to achieve higher marks in written tests.*

She was interrupted by the other five students who insisted the effect of role-play occurred gradually and Tommy even mentioned that English learning was a process with many aspects and we could not limit the improvement of only one aspect. Nonetheless, all the students agreed with Angela that teacher should give them more help with grammar and correct their mistakes later to solve the problem. They all agreed that their teacher did not do much to evaluate the grammar aspects of their performance.

The description of the problems made by the students from higher grades closely resembled that from the lower level students except two students, Bill (Grade 10) and Wendy (Grade 11), mentioned that they had little time to do role-play after the teachers taught them new knowledge. Wendy explained this was because the vocabulary and grammar they learnt were much more difficult than before and the teacher had to spend longer time on explanation. Little time is left to do role-play in class. Her classmate Alex proposed an interesting solution to such a problem:

> *I think we can have a special role-play class on Friday each week in which we should use and practice what we have learnt this week in the role-play with whatever topic we want.*

### 4.1.5.2 Problems that Emerged in the Classroom Observed

During classroom observations, I noticed that most of the problems mentioned by the teachers and their students did emerge in class, though different problems occurred in different classes. Therefore, in this section, I will list the problems of each class respectively.

**Grade 7**

*Li*

As Li was the most experienced teacher, the problem of lack of interests to participate and perform did not even occur in her class. She told me she avoided such a problem because she intentionally organized role-play groups with both active and "quiet" students together and had the active students help those "quiet" students to choose their roles and make up dialogues. The only problem that occurred in her class was that two boys sitting in the back did not listen to the others' performance carefully during the last two minutes of that class. They were packing their school bags and appeared ready to rush out of the classroom. Li noticed the problem during class and she used gestures to make them concentrate and she punished them after class. I happened to be there during the break time and I found out the reason they were packing their bags was because that Li's class was the fifth class in the morning and it was about lunch time, which was the rush hour of the school and there was always a long line to buy lunch. The boys did not want to wait in the line so they started to get ready to rush to the dinning hall. I was amused at the situation and I realized the mood and situation could have negative effect on students' attitudes.

*Grade 8*

*Lian*

Similarly, Lian managed to make her students participate actively in the role-play and no one kept quite in class. She listed her efforts to solve the problem including giving them rewards such as candy bars or oral praise, and asking them to evaluate each other's performance. The problem of shortness of time occurred in her class, obviously, as she failed to have students employ the most open-ended

role-play in class. Her solution to that was to leave such a role-play as homework. Five out of the six students noticed her efforts to solve the problem. Two of the five students expressed their appreciation of Lian's efforts while the other three thought it was not as effective to do role-play as homework because they did not have time to really perform the role-play with their classmates after class and they were not motivated to do that if there were no examinations and marks for the after-class role-play.

### *Wang*

Though teaching the same grade (Grade 8), the three teachers had different problems. As a less experienced teacher, Wang had less effective classroom management. In her class, the students were very noisy while preparing in groups and I noticed most of them spoke Chinese. As I asked her this question, she told me because the students were at the beginner's level, speaking Chinese was necessary in the preparation stage. I agreed with her in that but I noticed that sometimes the students chatted in Chinese about something irrelevant to that class and this was definitely a problem. Many of her students told me that "we had too much time for preparation as the role-play was too easy for us to do (Genius)" and "we should not be blamed because we started chatting after we finished the tasks" (Tommy).

The lack of interest to participate occurred in her class, remarkably. One girl in the first row was sleeping throughout the class and Wang ignored her all the time. Two boys in the fourth row kept chatting in Chinese and did not do the role-play at all. When Wang asked them to do role-play, they stood still in front of the class and kept silent. Wang showed her frustration in class and later told the

boys they got extra time to prepare and she would ask them to do the role-play in the next class. When we discussed this problem, Wang told me the girl and the two boys had very low English proficiency compared with their peers and they could only achieve 20 marks out of the 100 marks in written tasks. The girl had transferred from another common public school into EFLS and was still not accustomed to the new learning environment. The two boys were not new students but they were "big headache" for teachers at this grade and their parents could not control them as they were too busy with their own career or business. She said she had private conversations with all three of them but it had little effect.

### *Fang*

Wang seemed to give her students too much time to prepare role-plays. On the contrary, in Fang's class the students lacked time to prepare, since the role-play given was flexible and challenging. One group did not perform well in that class. The students in the group pretended to be a reporter interviewing a slave master and two slaves. The idea was creative and interesting but their performance did not show that they had a good understanding of the roles they played. Neither did they use necessary words and phrases from the given text. All six of the student participants blamed the bad performance of that group on the shortness of time and they contended that group could do much better if preparation time is sufficient. His student James added that if they were given more time for preparation, the class could be less noisy during the performing period because the other groups did not need to prepare for their own when their peers were acting.

***Grade 9***

***Ding***

As the students in Ding's class were elder and more well-behaved, the problem of too much noise did not occur in her class. Also, as the material of the class was about mysterious superstition, the majority of her students were engaged in the role-play activities and used their imagination in the performance. Nonetheless, I still found two problems. The first problem was recorded in my field notes:

> *The fourth group performed a role-play between the vampire, the girl bitten by the vampire and the garlic man. They were trying to be funny and everyone laughed. However, I did not understand what the garlic man did in the end and why he did that. Moreover, the boy acting the garlic man appeared not well-prepared. He stammered all the time and his speaking was hard to comprehend.*

The problem was also noticed by her students. Juliet said:

> *It was common that we all laughed at a funny role-play but we did not understand what it wanted to tell us. Many of us paid much attention to the plots of role-play but ignored what the teachers wanted us to practice.*

Ding told me this phenomenon occurred very often and she felt her educational purpose sometimes could not be conveyed when role-play activities ended up as play acting. She thought the most powerful solution would be evaluate and mark each group's performance. However, she complained that would add much workload to the teacher's schedule.

The second problem was the lack of respect shown to the peers' performance. Actually, this problem occurred in other classes as well and many students only concentrated on their own performance while the other groups were acting. The reason for this, as explained by the teachers, was the lack of time to

prepare for their own role-play. However, in Ding's class, I found some groups laughed at the boy who stumbled every time and even a girl said: "clumsy clumsy Ben." They showed their attitude toward the "non-stream" students directly. Ding ignored this problem during the class and she did not take any solutions. When I asked her about this, she told me she thought that was not right but she did not notice the phenomenon as she was busy with understanding the boy. She said she would pay more attention to the problem next time. She also asked me for advice on how she could solve the problem, which I will explain in the analysis part later.

### *Grade 10*

### *Kong*

In accord with the teachers and students' descriptions, students at grade 10 appeared less interested in the role-play. When Kong asked if there were any volunteers for the performance, only one group came to the front after quite a while of silence. This was totally different from the situation in classes at grade 7 to 8, where each group volunteered to be the first one on the stage and showed much enthusiasm. Nonetheless, I noticed that Kong skilfully introduced the topic in a lively way by putting herself in the role and showed the students the sample role-play. She also made jokes with some sleepy students which soon woke them up. All her students expressed their appreciation of Kong's effort. Vic commented:

> *Miss Kong is not easy. She is young but she teaches well and always introduces the topics in a lively way. She tries different ways to engage us in the role-playing activities and normally it takes effect. However, the class you observed was the first class in the afternoon when everyone just finished their lunch and became sleepy.*

### *4.1.5.3 Findings and Analysis*

### *Commonly encountered problems & solutions*

The data transcription and analysis suggested many overlaps of the problems described in the teachers' classes. Despite individual differences, most problems found by the teachers were similar. Six out of the seven mentioned that they sometimes had difficulty controlling the class when the students became too excited and made much noise. Besides, some groups only paid attention to their own performance and they prepared their role-play while the others were performing. They also claimed that role-play took too much time and they found it hard to give every group the chance to perform in one class.

In my opinion, the major problems mentioned by the participants in the interviews and the problems observed in class echoed Van Ments's (1990) view that despite being a useful teaching technique, role-play has lots of potential disadvantages. Van Ments made a list of these disadvantages and my field study showed that these potential disadvantages could result in real problems in class. For instance, he mentioned that role-play took a large amount of time and this did cause the problem that not every group could perform in class and the students could not get sufficient time when they prepared for more difficult role-plays. Moreover, Van Ments mentioned that the tutor lost control over what was learnt and the order in which it was learnt, which did cause the problem that the students did not know what they should do and some of the teaching objectives could not be achieved in class.

Sato (2000) addressed more practical problems with using role-play and summarized them into seven different categories: the lack of classroom space; cost of a lot of classroom time; students' playing acting; chaos in the classroom;

the lack of grammar work; and lack of enough opportunity to participate. The problems mentioned in the interviews together with those recorded in class observations corresponded with most problems Sato summarized, except for that no participants mentioned the problem of insufficient classroom space. This was probably because the school was a special foreign language school and it set up small classes with few students for language teaching. Every regular class was divided into two small classes to learn English at this school. Each small English class had its own classroom which was big enough for students to do role-plays. Accordingly, none of the teachers or students complained about the lack of space.

Except for that, the other problems mentioned by Sato seemed to emerge in most teachers' classes. Sato (2000) presented a series of solutions to each problem. I noticed that some solutions were actually used by the teachers with success while the others were either not used by the teachers or used but did not work to solve the problems. For instance, Sato cited Ladousse's (1987) suggestions for teachers to control classroom chaos. One hint he cited was that the teachers had better keep the activity short. This was actually used by Li to control the class and was proved to be useful. The teachers did not use other methods suggested by Ladousse, which in my view could be really helpful. For instance, Ladousse recommended teachers have a follow-up activity for the groups that finish their role-play before the others. This in my opinion was a very good solution to the problem. If Wang's group had been given another assignment to do, they would have concentrated more in class.

Besides citing Ladousse's hints to solve the problems of classroom chaos, Sato also gave his own solutions based on his teaching experience. I think the

most outstanding one was to increase the level of audience participation by organizing some activities among students who watched the other group's performance. For instance, teachers could have the audience summarize the role-play they watched, evaluate the role-play by writing comments or even take role-switch activity in which the audience and actors/ actresses changed their roles. I found his solution helpful and interesting but only Lian used such as solution to a limited degree. She asked her students to evaluate their peers' performance but she did not do the role-switch activity. I mentioned some of the solutions to the teacher participants after the study; they all took great interest and promised to try the solutions in the future.

The problem that some students did not participate in class was not mentioned by Sato but actually was addressed by the teachers and most students, though they listed different causes of the problem. Wang, the youngest one thought the problem was due to her students' low English proficiency or the reluctance to study in a new environment. Kong argued that her students were bored with the repeatedly used role-play activities. Ding and Kong's students added that they were either too busy or too sleepy which influenced their level of participation.

The teachers and students' analysis of the causes of the lack of interest in role-play unfolds various factors which might have negative effect on the students' motivation for role-play including time, role-play types, materials, age, workload, and their mood. Furthermore, every teacher and student agreed that gender differences did not lead to the different role-play performance as much as the personality and they said the personality would be a crucial factor that

influenced individual's attitudes, motivation, and performance of role-play. Wang and her student's comments display that it is hard to force "shy" students to perform. As a result, teachers should take into account all these factors while designing and organizing a role-play.

*Individual differences concerning problems and solutions*

In addition to the problems mentioned above, different problems also occurred in different teachers' classes and with various grades.

For instance, students at lower grades were more enthusiastic with role-play and nearly every group volunteered to be the first on stage. They sometimes became too noisy and the teachers should take some time to control them (seen from Wang's class). For students at higher grades alternatively, noise was not an issue as they were more well-behaved but less enthusiastic.

It was noticeable that it was not easy to engage higher level students in the activity, and Kong expressed her frustration that she could not force them to do the role-play. She understood fully that they were too busy and too familiar with the teaching format. She said she sometimes taught them English popular songs during class to encourage or wake them up, which I thought was her effort to explore alternative communicative activities in class. This illustrates that it was not wise to use role-play as the only communicative activity all the time and the teachers should employ a variety of communicative activities such as games, songs, and competitions to keep their students' learning motivation.

In addition to various grades, teaching experience also lead to the differences in the problems occurred in the classroom. While Li's students were even younger than Wang's class, there was less noisy in her class which showed

she had better classroom management skills. Li walked around when students were preparing for the role-plays and made sure everyone had a chance to speak. She told me that she wanted every student to know why they need to do role-play and what they should do at every step in class. This also suggested that the more experienced teacher might have fewer problems with classroom control, and by using clear instructions, the problem of role-play ending up as play with no learning would be avoided.

Most problems I found with the teachers' implementation corresponded with a number of researchers' (e.g., Ladousse, 1987; Sato, 2001; Van Ments, 1999) classification of problems. However, there were three problems they did not cover which did happen in teachers' classes. The first problem was the students' lack of interests to participate. The other two were the lack of respect shown to their peers' problem and the overemphasis of the role-playing technique without innovations of classroom activities.

The second problem was found in Ding's class during which the students did not show enough respect to the stammering boy throughout the performance. Through conversation with Ding and her students, I found both Ding and her students did not consider it as a problem and they thought it was more important to force those students to speak. This reminded me of my past experience when some of my students laughed at a girl named Chun when she was speaking English as she spoke with strong accent (her story was earlier presented in Chapter 1). The students held a negative attitude toward her as she seldom participated in classroom activities. What I did at that time was simply encouraging Chun and order some model students to help her. Although as a

result, Chun's English was greatly improved, I could feel that she still lacked confidence and interest in learning English.

The case of the stammering Ben and my student Chun reflected one problem with the currently dominant CLT approach which as Bax (2003) illustrated: "now has a negative effect due to misplaced priorities on the role of the teacher, which draws attention away from the context of teaching and learning." It seemed that Ding and I (at that time) regarded having students participate in classroom activities using the target language as the prime priority, and ignore the students' individual learning needs and their cultural backgrounds. In chapter one and chapter two, I had presented the process of myself exploring such a problem and I offered a detailed explanation of the CRCLT model as an alternative teaching model for CLT. After I did the data analysis, I became more confident of my proposed model, and I thought it would more or less help to improve the current situation. Having full agreement with Manning (2003) that "language education is never neutral" (p.132), I firmly insist that it is teacher's responsibility to teach the students to learn to respect each other during the learning process. I hope teachers make friends with the students, treat each student fairly regardless of their cultural, educational, economical, and language backgrounds as well as the students' awareness to respect each other.

The third problem that was seldom addressed by the researchers was the overemphasis of role-play without innovations of the technique and alternatives for communicative exercises in class. Kong told me the cause of the problem was the misplaced priorities on the acting at school, and as a result, some teachers and students attached little importance to the grammar instruction and preparation

stage. If time is limited, the teachers might cut the time for instruction and preparation, which consequently lead to the failure of the realization of the educational purpose. Kong also added that some teachers used role-play when it was not necessary and they always used the same type of role-play. Her comment was valuable and corresponded with Kaur (2002) that role-play was losing its role in the language class due to the lack of resourcefulness and innovation on the part of some teachers. Kaur offered suggestions such as improving teacher preparation programs, changing the classroom culture and having workshops for students, which in my view were important and should be considered by the educational administrators and practitioners in order to improve the situation.

The following table summarized each problem reflected from data analysis together with its causes and possible solutions.

| Problems unfolded from data analysis | Problem Causes | Solutions | Frequency of occurrence | Researchers addressing those problems |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Classroom chaos | Improper level of role-play used, students' overexcitement | Choose proper level, use follow-up activities, engage audience in role-play, evaluate | Common | Ladousse, Sato Van; Ments, |
| Lack of time | Curriculum, difficult materials | Hard to deal with | Common | Sato, Van Ments, |
| Lack of participation | Various factors: mood, time, proficiency level, personality, course load, lack of innovation of role-play | Consider all the factors, design according to individual needs | Common | Not available |
| Play Acting | Insufficient instruction and evaluation | Explicit instruction and detailed evaluation | More common with lower grades | Van Ments, |

| | | Teachers have more training and resources, promotion of other communicative activities, change of training programs and curriculum | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Overemphasis of role-play | Lack of innovations and alterative teaching methods, overuse of role-play at the school | | individual | Bax, Kirk |
| Disrespect to the other students' performance | Misplaced priority, ignorance to the students' individual backgrounds, little emphasis on the awareness to respect the others | Teachers treat each student fairly, offer special help and care for "non-stream: students | individual | Bax |

***Fig.18: Problems unfolded & Solutions***

*Two predicted problems that were not found*

Before I started the field work, I did have some assumptions regarding the problems that would possibly be found in the participants' EFL classes. One would be the students' cultural tension and conflict which occurred in my class in the past. My student Chun showed her confusion about addressing only western culture at school and she expressed her willingness to learn the Chinese culture in English as well. With this past experience together with the review of the relevant literature, I assumed such cultural tension and conflict would also be found in the participants' classes. To my surprise, only one student mentioned that he hoped to learn more about Chinese culture in class. The other students regardless of their various English proficiency and individual needs did not mention such a problem. When I intentionally asked them about this issue, the students told me that they were aware that the major goal to use the western content based course books was to help them to improve their English and immerse them into the Western life and to practice the target language in real-life like settings. The majority of the students told me that was also the reason they chose to study in this special

foreign language school. Alex (G11) wrote: "Learning Western culture can not blind us with our own culture. We could learn Chinese culture in Chinese and history lessons anyway." Like Alex, a number of students from higher grades suggested teachers of different subjects should co-teach sometimes to address different cultures, which was a very interesting idea and corresponded with my suggestions in the implication for CRCLT. Moreover, from the classroom observations, I found that most teachers intentionally, or unintentionally, referred to the Chinese culture in class. For instance, Ding introduced the topic of superstition with the discussion of it in the Chinese culture and she asked the students to present different superstitions in the world in their role-plays. The findings reveal that in this special foreign language school, both teachers and students had already developed some sense of cultural awareness and the problem of cultural conflict was not a big problem. The students' advice on the interdisciplinary teaching also provided a sound rationale for the proposed CRCLT approach, which encouraged teachers of different subjects to co-operate to improve students' inter-cultural awareness.

The other predicted problem was the inequality between teachers' role-play implementation and students' performance caused by gender differences. I had the assumption, as in China, that most EFL teachers were female, and I assumed that male teachers might be marginalized and find it more difficult to teach English and organize activities. However, my view was changed by Fang, the only male teacher in the study who insisted that gender would not be an issue other than personality and educational and professional backgrounds. However, he still admitted that he should learn from the female teachers to become more careful

and sensitive for his students' individual needs. Consistent with his comment, most of his students were satisfied with their male teacher. In terms of the students, I assumed that female students would act much better than male students, which would affect the male students' confidence and motivation. Such an assumption flowed from my pervious research studying the gender differences in different EFL classrooms, which showed that "female learners show possible superiority in their second language learning process (Boyle, 1987; Burstall, 1975; Ehrlich, 2001). However, such a result was challenged by the data collected for the current study as no teachers or students mentioned this as a problem. Moreover, I found boys could do as well as the girls in role-play implementation and they exceeded girls on the plots and acting. Most groups acting role-plays were formed by both boys and girls. Half of the teachers told me they intentionally organized the groups by including both genders because they found most boys were gifted in planning role-plays while girls could offer boys more help with grammar and speaking. This suggests one extra advantage of role-play: promote cooperation and competition between both genders and motivate them to improve their English.

### 4.1.6 Teachers' Roles &Tasks in Conducting Role-play

### 4.1.6.1 Teachers and Students' Descriptions

As all teachers interviewed had been using role-play for over three years and, through classroom practice, every one of them noticed certain roles and tasks for teachers during their role-play implementation. Though using different words, every teacher interviewed agreed on their roles as the leader and supporter, who instructed the students and supported them by telling them what to do and how to

do it. The majority of teachers' perceptions regarding the roles were general and some of them did not give further comments on the roles.

As for the tasks teachers need to do, all seven teachers mentioned that teachers should be familiar with the text and decide the teaching objectives properly. Then they should teach the students new vocabulary and grammar in the text and help the students grasp the new knowledge before performing. Kong identified the procedure as the traditional routine of the teachers in every role-play class.

Teachers with more working experience and training offered me a detailed list, which showed their deeper understanding of the roles and tasks. Li said:

> *I think the teacher should be a designer at first. He/she must be familiar with the text and try to find interesting topics for students to do for role-plays. Second, the teacher should be the audience, who watches the students' performance and makes records of their strong and weak points. And last but not least, the teacher should be an evaluator, who comments on the strong and weak points and encourages the students to do better.*

Lian described the tasks teachers need to do:

> *The successful role-play implementation places high demands on us teachers. Before the students start to do role-play, we should illustrate new words and grammar structures the students will use in the role-play. For instance, if the text is a news report in scientific field, we should prepare the students with the jargons and even background knowledge for journalism. Besides, we should offer students instruction and support whenever necessary. When the students are performing, we should make a list of their good points such as good sentences or clever designing as well as weak points such as grammar mistakes.*

Li made the following suggestions on what the teachers need to pay attention to in order to complete the tasks:

> *The teacher should comprehend the course materials and the teaching goals thoroughly. He/she should decide whether the text is suitable to do role-play or consider which type/types of role-play could be incorporated*

*within the class. It is also important to ensure what the students know and what they don't know. For example, if many students already know how to respond as an interviewee to an interviewer, then the teacher can use less time to prepare them for this.*

Both Lian and Kong mentioned that teachers should also do some follow-up activities after role-play to teach the students something beyond the text. For instance, Lian said the teacher could ask the students to write a new notice after the role-play.

Those detailed descriptions of the roles and tasks showed that teachers had a good understanding of them through practice regardless of the lack of theoretical knowledge. Such a finding could also be inferred from the students' comments. When asked what marks the teachers could receive for conducting role-play, no marks below 80 were given by the students. All students of Li, Lian, Kong, and Ding seemed satisfied with their teachers' role-play implementation, and awarded scores over 90. They told me that they believed their EFL teacher was experienced in using role-play as they gave the students more flexible and interesting role-plays to do and they could control the class well. Nonetheless, half of their students all mentioned coincidentally that they expected their teachers to offer them more freedom in role-play.

Comparatively, Wang and Fang gave general and simple descriptions of the roles and tasks of teachers while conducting role-play. Moreover, as seen from the marks the students gave, Wang received lowest grades, which indicated that she was less skilful in performing the roles and doing the tasks. However, it was worth noticing that the average score she got was still at a good level, and it would be hard for a teacher with less experience and academic backgrounds to

achieve the same good scores as the more experienced teacher. Her students offered suggestions to her in various aspects regarding her role-play implementation. Tommy thought Wang should correct their grammar mistakes after their performance. Joy added that sometimes Wang lost her temper and did not pay enough attention to what the students spoke when the class was noisy. However, one student Claris explained that Wang didn't listen because she had to control the classroom. Genius suggested that Wang should evaluate their performance after each role-play and Angela mentioned that she could offer certain prizes such as the best actor and actress to make the activity more competitive. In my view, these suggestions were valuable and it is necessary for teachers to hear their students' voice in order to improve their teaching.

### *4.1.6.2 The Roles and Tasks Teachers Performed in the Classes Observed*

Reflected from the observations, all teachers made attempts to perform the roles and tasks they mentioned in the first interview, though to different extent. It seemed that experienced teachers not only had a better understanding of the roles and tasks, but also did better in practice. I would describe how they achieved each role and task by presenting what each teacher did in his/her classes.

*Grade 8*

*Li*

At the beginning of her class, Li taught the vocabulary and grammar in the text, then she had her students get familiar with both grammar structures and the content of the text by doing a variety of drills and exercises. Next she gave them detailed instruction on role-play. After she assigned the role-play which required the students to introduce various tour sites in Nanjing and in Southwest England,

she had them review what they had learnt quickly. Afterwards, she walked around the groups and offered them support for preparing role-play. Moreover, she took care of some students and assigned them into special groups. This showed that she was familiar with the text and the teaching objectives and she performed the role as a designer successfully. When the groups performed the role-play, she watched carefully and after that she asked the audience to evaluate the group's work before she gave any comments herself. This showed her role as the onlooker and critic. However, whereas she did play the roles she mentioned, she didn't perform some of the tasks of the roles as well as the others. For instance, she didn't make any records of the performance and although she corrected some students' mistakes in pronunciation, she didn't correct their grammar mistakes in her comments. She did not evaluate each group's performance either and she explained the shortness of time prevented her from giving detailed evaluation to each group in the later interview.

### *Grade 8*

### *Lian*

The roles and tasks Lian implemented in her class were much similar to those of Li's. Nevertheless, she acted as a better critic and gave satisfactory evaluation to each group. She also invited each group to comment on their peers' performance and summarize each group's good points and bad points. In the post-observation interview, all the students were satisfied with her evaluation and they believed such debriefing helped them to consolidate their knowledge and improve their grammatical knowledge. It was worth noting that Lian also designed follow-up activities after the students' role-play performance. She

expected to teach the students the notice writing skills but due to the lack of time, she could only assign that as homework.

### Wang

Compared with the two teachers mentioned above, though Wang acted as a leader, supporter and evaluator, she did not perform as skilfully as Li and Lian. For instance, she stood still near the platform and only came to the groups when the students asked her to come to help them. She also did not assign students into groups and only asked them to form a group by themselves. In the debriefing stage, although she managed to evaluate each group's performance, her comment was simple with little review of the students' grammar mistakes. She seemed to have difficulty dealing with the classroom discipline problems and accordingly the class became very noisy after the students began to prepare for their role-plays. Moreover, she ignored the two boys and one girl who did not participate. This showed she still needs to improve her technique to become a good leader to control her class and address the needs of all her students, including those who were reluctant to implement the activity.

### Fang

Fang's description of the roles and responsibilities was general and simple, and as he commented in his interview, he offered the students necessary instructions and preparation both in language and in culture for the role-play. Nonetheless, he showed little sense to be a leader and evaluator. He did not care about the noise in class and never stopped the students talking no matter whether they were talking in English or Chinese. As he explained in the interview, that noise indicated the students were practising. However, in my view, he still needs

to make sure the students were talking about the text.

*Grade 9*

*Ding*

Recalling the problems mentioned earlier, Ding did not notice the problem of students' lack of respect to their peers' performance. This suggested that she did not act as a successful audience or onlooker. In spite of this flaw, she successfully fulfilled the roles and tasks as the supporter and the designer, and she managed to address different cultures in her role-play classes and engage her students in a variety of activities. This showed that she did a lot of work before the class and she was familiar with the educational purpose of the materials. I noticed that she smiled or laughed with the student audience when the students did a good job, which also encouraged her students as well as influenced her later oral evaluation.

*Grade 10*

*Kong*

Though less experienced than Li and Lian, Kong successfully carried the roles and responsibilities the teachers mentioned above. What was surprising was she even took the role as "co-player" (Roskos, 1990) in her class. She acted as an annoying wife whose husband snored all night and acted a monologue. Her performance was amusing and successfully guided her students' own works. Later in the interview, she said this was one of her innovation for the role-play implementation which, as agreed by all her students, had a positive effect to raise students' level of participation.

**4.1.6.3 Findings & Analysis**

*Shared roles and tasks of the teacher participants*

As Vanment (1990) mentioned earlier, role-play is best used in teaching language when the teachers fully understand their roles and take responsibilities using certain techniques, following necessary procedures to accomplish the tasks mentioned above. Based on the interviews and observations, I found that despite their individual differences, all teachers had developed a general sense of the roles and tasks for doing role-play from their teaching practice, though to differing degrees.

Although teachers used different terms to define the roles, many overlaps arose between the tasks of the roles they mentioned. For instance, the majority of the teachers addressed the importance of being a good designer or leader who fully comprehends the teaching objectives of the course materials in order to design a proper role-playing activity. Their interviews and classroom practice indicated that they attached importance to appropriate preparation for their students to do role-play such as grammar and content illustration. Besides, they also emphasized it was important to offer explicit guidelines and support for their students' performance.

The leader/planner role and its tasks mentioned by the teachers reminded me of Milroy's (1982) summary for teachers' tasks to be fulfilled in certain procedures to do a role-play. These tasks teachers mentioned belonged to the preparation stage Milroy depicted. According to him, during the preparation stage, the teacher needs to choose a relevant situation; determine roles and assemble information. In the briefing stage, the teacher outlines educational purposes; declares situation and roles, gives opportunities for role-takers to establish their

own intra-personal information as well as makes arrangements for the setting-up of the role-play. As seen from the teachers' description in the interview and their performance in class, they all paid attention to the tasks they needed to do in the preparation stage.

Besides the above two roles, the majority of teachers developed a sense of being the "supporter" as well. Li asserted that the teachers should help the students to solve their problems and facilitate their dialogue, while Lian commented that the teachers should pay attention to the students' performance and gave them comments on the performance. All these tasks belonged to those mentioned by Milroy (1990) during the stage of interaction and discussion. According to him, during the interaction stage, the teacher should support role-takers and draw attention to the aspects of interaction while in the discussion stage, the teacher needs to identify different learning points; help students put interaction into perspective, encourage each student to participate and help members appreciate the insights and skills necessary for the effective playing of roles in life situations similar to the simulated ones.

Through data analysis, I noticed that the roles mentioned and performed by the teachers complied closely with the roles of adults in play summarized by Roskos (1995) as onlooker, stage manager, co-player, and play leader. All tasks were mentioned by teachers except the tasks of "co-player." Interestingly, though the tasks of the role "co-player" were not addressed by the teachers, it was fulfilled by Kong in her class in which she took a role as a wife complaining about her snoring husband and asked advice from her students. As described later, Kong did this in order to motivate and guide her students to work out their own

role-plays which was commented by all her students as effective. It was important to note that the "co-player" did by Kong only required the teacher became an actor/actress in the role-play, while the "co-player" Roskos mentioned placed other demands on teachers such as to guide the plots of the role-play, to define roles and responsibilities of different characters in some groups' role-play and help the students to mediate their dialogue.

*Differences between teachers' understanding and performance of the roles and tasks*

Despite the overlaps between the roles and tasks the teachers mentioned and performed, there were a number of differences between their understating and performance of the roles and tasks. As seen from the first interview, half of the teacher gave general and short answers while the more experienced teachers gave detailed and specific descriptions of the roles and tasks. I believe the reason for such a difference, together with the other differences mentioned in the previous sections, resulted from teachers' different academic and professional backgrounds. More experienced and professional teachers showed a deeper understanding of the roles and tasks in role-play implementation.

The differences between teachers could be seen clearly from their students' comments. The average score Li, Lian, Ding and Kong got for their role-play implementation from their students were above 90 while Wang only got around 80 for her performance. Moreover, in the first interview, Li's students only mentioned they hoped she could give them fewer limits to do role-play, and in the after class interview they complained about the problem of the lack of preparation time. In contrast, Wang's students gave a variety of suggestions to her use of

role-play no matter whether in the first interview or in the second. Nonetheless, it was important to emphasize here that as a young and less experienced teacher, Wang had shown her potential to use role-play effectively by getting a satisfactory score, and I predict that she would do much better in the near future as she gained more theoretical knowledge and professional experience.

All suggestions mentioned by the students were valuable and they helped me to develop a more specific idea of what problems teachers need to consider before performing their roles and tasks in class. For instance, Fang's students advised him to give them more time to prepare flexible role-plays, which reminded teachers to design their role-play activities more carefully and draw attention to the time arrangement for different types of role-play as well as different procedures in the same role-play. Moreover, Wang's students suggested she should establish certain prizes to evaluate their performance such as "best actor/actress." Such an idea was not only interesting, but also helpful for teachers to raise the quality of students' performance.

The classroom observation also reflected the divergences between the skills of teachers. According to my observation, the most experienced teachers performed more roles and tasks they mentioned, although they did better with some than the others. The following comparison between Li, (the most experienced teacher) and Wang (the least experienced teacher) was provided to illustrate such a phenomenon.

In Li's class, she carefully prepared the students both with the content and the grammar and she also offered them support by walking around each group and provided those in need of help with her suggestions. Moreover, she made attempts

to help those "shy" students by assigning them to more active groups. She successfully played the roles as a designer and onlooker. However, she didn't do as well as a critic. She didn't make records when the students gave performance and neither did she offer detailed evaluation in the end.

In contrast, Wang didn't play the roles and complete the tasks as successfully as Li. Although she mentioned the roles as the play leader and supporter, and she did prepare the students with grammar and content by giving them a variety of drills and exercises to do, she did not play the two roles she mentioned in the preparation stage and performance stage. She neither walked around the classroom and offered support to the groups nor gave enough comment on the performance. Besides, more importantly, she failed to have every student engaged in the activity and control the noise in the classroom. Accordingly, most of her students mentioned these problems and they offered various suggestions in the second interview.

The differences between Li and Wang's understanding and performance of the roles and tasks proved Van Ments's (1990) view that "although the use of role-play puts a powerful tool in the hands of the trainer or educator, it is a tool which requires much more skill and care than most educational techniques"(p.33). Van Ments broke down the competence that teachers needed to have to conduct role-play into three aspects: a through knowledge of the methodology; sensitive to individuals and group behavior; self-knowledge, maturity and balance. According to the two teachers' behavior, I found that although neither Li nor Wang had a thorough knowledge of role-play, Li, the more experienced teachers showed her competence of being sensitive to individuals as she gave support to every group

and did not ignore one student in that class. Besides, she also showed her skills by helping her students form good study habits such as note-taking. Differently, Wang did not display the same expertise.

## 4.2 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reported analyzed the research findings with the purpose of locating the role-play implementation issues of common concern to Chinese EFL teachers and their students, scrutinized in light of existing theories. While analyzing the data obtained, I have identified six major themes including: teachers' training of role-play, types of role-play implemented; course materials and class types for using role-play; effectiveness of role-play in class; problems with classroom practice, and roles and tasks of teachers in conducting role-play. Some of the findings corresponded with the SLA and role-play theories reviewed and provided vivid classroom demonstration of current Chinese EFL education trends. However, some findings challenged the researchers' views and indicated that the theory and instruction in literature may need to be articulated in real classroom settings. Moreover, most achieved results got on line with my assumptions that my proposed CRCLT model was necessary in Chinese EFL education and role-play could be an ideal way to promote such a teaching model if effectively designed and implemented. In the next chapter, efforts will be devoted to a summary of the findings of this research; a presentation of implications of the findings for classroom practice, teacher training, curriculum design and future research together with a presentation of a sample role-play project "Christmas" integrating different levels of role-plays in various types of classes.

## CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS

### 5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, efforts will be devoted to a summary of the major findings of this research around the unfolded themes; a presentation of implications for the findings for classroom practice, teacher training, curriculum design together with proposition of a sample role-play project "Christmas" integrating different levels of role-plays in various types of classes. The chapter ends with a section of concluding remarks that include an overview of the study as well as its significance and limitations.

### 5.1 Major Findings & Discussion

#### 5.1.1 Major Advantages

The data analysis presented before proved that role-play did play an important role in EFL education. The advantages of role-play demonstrated in my study are listed below under the following headings: a) motivation aspects; b) language aspects; and c) cultural aspects.

#### 5.1.1.1 Motivation Aspects

First, role-play offers students authentic and relaxing environment which can solve their "foreign language learning anxiety" (Makita, 1995) or frustration as correction of mistakes were not overly emphasized and the process was enjoyable (see Kaur, 2002; Makita ,1995).

Second, it creates an enjoyable and interesting learning environment in which students are encouraged to use their imaginations in designing and performing different roles and plots while employing authentic communication in the target language (see Kodotchigova , 2001 , Makita, 1995, Sato, 1995, Van Ment1999).

### 5.1.1.2 Language Aspects

First, role-play facilitates students' learning of the four language skills including listening, speaking, reading and writing, though to various degrees. It was apparent that the use of role-play was more frequently involved speaking and reading and it did function more obviously involved oral skills.

Second, it improves students both verbal and non-verbal "skills that are needed for the language process rather than simply being a technique for exploring content" (Sharn, 1976, p.182). Those skills include logic and critical thinking, imagination and creativity, interpersonal skills such as solving argument to ensure team work, performing skills as well as note-taking skills.

### 5.1.1.3 Cultural Aspects

The findings suggest that if effectively used, role-play could be an ideal technique for experiencing cultural awareness (Kodotchigova , 2001; Liao & Chism, 2005) and it

could be used to for my proposed Culturally Responsive Communicative Teaching (CRCLT) Model for EFL education. For instance, in different classes observed, the students interacted with each other in a variety of settings, such as at school, in the plant, in the space, or at a tour site in Nanjing. Role-plays offered them a good opportunity to deal with a range of culturally sensitive areas such as greetings, apologizing and self-introduction relevant to these different life settings in their dialogues. Moreover, as proved in Kong and Fang's class, role-plays provided the students "armed with increased role-awareness and made them better prepared for free interdisciplinary communication in the target language" (Tyers, 2002, p.165).

*5.1.2 Major Problems and Solutions*

My study also reveals several theoretical and practical problems with Chinese EFL teachers' implementation and the following paragraphs will restate these problems under the two headings: namely, problems with the current situation and pedagogical problems that occurred in classrooms.

Role-play, like other teaching approaches, has its weaknesses. It has potential drawbacks which can cause real problems in class. The problems with current role-play implementation and the real problems the participants in the classroom could be summarized as follows:

*5.1.2.1 Problems with Current Situation and Solutions*

First, as concluded from the first theme related to, teacher training for using role-play, there is a lack of professional and theoretical preparation for teachers using role-play both in teachers' college and in the schools where they work. Their major training sources of them were general introduction of communicative language approaches including role-play with a few sentences or the observation of experienced teachers using role-play. As a result, from the classroom observation, I noticed that the teachers found it difficult to deal with some problems that emerged in their classrooms.

Second, there is an overemphasis of role-play among foreign language schools where teachers are required to use role-play with the same introduction procedure. One problem that results from this was that the students, especially students from higher grades, became bored with the technique and thus, "role-play is losing its role in the language class due to the lack of resourcefulness and innovation on the part of some teachers" (Kaur, 2002).

The solutions suggested by participants include organizing workshops both for teachers and students at school, establishing certain programs at teachers' colleges and holding international conferences focused on the use of role-play.

### *5.1.2.2 Pedagogical Problems in the Classroom and Suggested Solutions*

The findings proved Van Ments's (1990) list of potential disadvantages such as the amount of time required and the tutor's loss of control of could result in real problems in class using role-play. Most problems found in the study corresponded with those Sato summarized with the exception that no participants mentioned the problem of insufficient classroom space. According to Sato (2001), the problems include:

1) The lack of classroom space,
2) Amount of classroom time required,
3) Students' play acting,
4) Chaos in the classroom,
5) The lack of grammar work
6) Lack of enough opportunity to participate. (p.16)

Sato has presented a series of solutions to each problem. I noticed that some solutions were actually used by the teachers with success while the others were either not used by the teachers or used but did not work to solve the problems. For instance, the most promising solution was to increase the level of audience's participation by organizing some activities among students who watched the other group's performance. I found his solution helpful and interesting but only Lian used such a solution to a limited degree. She asked her students to evaluate their peers' performance but she did not use the role-switch strategy.

The problem that some students lack interest in participating even if they have an opportunity to perform was not mentioned by Sato but actually was addressed by the teachers and most students, though they listed different causes of the problem. The

teachers and students' analysis of the causes of the lack of interest in role-play revealed various factors which might have negative effect on the students' motivation for role-play including time, role-play types, materials, age, workload and their mood. Furthermore, every teacher and student agreed that the gender differences did not influence the different role-play performance as much as the personality and they said that personality would be a crucial factor that influenced individual's attitudes, motivation and performance of role-plays. Wang and her student's comment displayed that it was hard to force "shy" students to perform. As a result, teachers should take into account all these factors while designing and organizing role-play activities.

The last problem that aroused my interest was the lack of respect shown to each other's performance. Such a problem occurred in Ding's class when the students were laughing at a stammering boy named Ben. Ben's case reminded me of my previous experience with my student Chun and I believe Ben and Chun's story reflected one problem with the currently dominant CLT approach which as Bax (2003) illustrated: "CLT now has a negative effect due to misplaced priorities on the role of the teacher, which draws attention away from the context of teaching and learning:" It seemed that Ding and I (at that time) regarded having students participate in classroom activities using the target language as the prime priority while ignoring the students' individual learning needs and their cultural preferences. After I completed the data analysis, I became more confident of my proposed model CRCLT, and I thought it would more or less help to improve the current situation.

### 5.1.3 Consistency with the Literature and the Researcher's Assumptions

As seen from the discussion under the two previous headings, most information I obtained from each theme corresponded with what the theorists tell the practitioners on

how to apply their theory to practice, an area which has been reviewed in the second chapter of this study. For instance, besides the merits and problems of role-play in classroom practice, the different types of role-playing activities used in class also complied closely with the literature. The types observed and discussed were consistent with Littlewood's (1981) list. Another example is that there were many overlaps between the tasks of the roles mentioned and performed by the teachers, which complied closely with the roles of adults in play summarized by Roskos (1995) as onlooker, stage manager, co-player and play leader. All those were in line with my research assumptions that while being an ideal technique to facilitate EFL teaching and learning process on the condition that "it is done in a thoughtful way (Van Ments, 1999, p.28).

### 5.1.4 Inconsistency between the Literature and the Researcher's Assumptions

### 5.1.4.1 Inconsistency with the Literature

There were quite a few results that seemed inconsistent with the theory. A good example was the perception of role-play done in class from the students in grade 7 and 8 which challenged Hine's (1978) view that a teacher-written skit with repeated use of a structure was one of the best role-playing activities for beginning and intermediate students. The classroom observation and interviews indicated that the ability of students at these levels should be reconsidered and teachers might employ more advanced role-plays. Moreover, Sato (2001) mentioned the lack of space for integrating role-play while most teachers and students did not mention that.

Besides the inconsistency with the literature, I found my findings also fill some gaps in the literature. To take Ben's case as an example, I found this problem of lack of respect toward their peers during performance was not found by other studies and I felt it was worth addressing in my study as it emphasized Manning's claim (2003) that

"language education is never neutral" (p.132), and I insist that it is teacher's responsibility to increase the students' awareness in respecting each other during the learning process. I hope teachers become sympathetic and helpful mentors who treat each student fairly regardless of their cultural, educational, economical and language backgrounds.

The inconsistency between theory and practice has shown that some of the theories need to be articulated in different classroom situations and also confirmed Omaggio-Hadley's (2001) view that language educators should take a flexible approach to teaching and designing activities to fit learner needs and preferences (p.118).

### 5.1.4.2 Inconsistency with the Researcher's Assumptions

Before I started the field work, I did have some assumptions regarding the problems that would possibly be found in the participants' EFL classes. For instance, with my aforementioned past experience with Chun as well as the review of the relevant literature, I assumed cultural tension and conflict would be found in the participants' classes. To my surprise, only one student mentioned that he hoped to learn more about Chinese culture in class. Most students informed me that they were aware that the major goal to use the western content based course books was to immerse them into the Western life to practice the target language in real-life like settings. The majority of the students told me that was also the reason why they chose to study in this special foreign language school. Moreover, from the classroom observations, I found that most teachers intentionally or unintentionally referred to the Chinese culture in class. The findings revealed that in this special foreign language school, both teachers and students had developed a general sense of cultural awareness and the problem of cultural conflict was not a big problem. The students' advice on the interdisciplinary teaching provided a

sounded rationale for the proposed CRCLT approach which encouraged teachers of different subjects to co-operate to improve students' inter-cultural awareness.

The other assumption lies in the gender differences. I assumed that in view of the greater number of female teachers than male teachers, male teachers might be marginalized and would find it difficult to teach English and organize activities. My view was changed by Fang, the only male teacher in the study who insisted that gender would not be an issue; that personality and educational and professional backgrounds were what counted. Nonetheless, he admitted that he should learn from the female teachers to become more careful and sensitive for his students' individual needs. Consistent with his comment, most his students were satisfied with their male teacher.

In terms of students, I assumed that female students would act much better than male students which would affect the male students' confidence and motivation. Such an assumption was derived from my pervious research studying the gender differences in different EFL classrooms which proved that "female learners show possible superiority in their second language learning process (Boyle, 1987; Burstall, 1975; Ehrlich, 2001). This result was challenged by the data achieved for the current study as no teachers and students mentioned this as a problem. Moreover, I found boys could do as well as the girls in role-play implementation and they surpassed girls in the plots and acting. Most groups acting role-plays were formed by both boys and girls. Half of the teachers told me they intentionally organized the groups by including both gender because they found most boys were gifted in planning role-plays while girls could offer boys more help with grammar and speaking. This suggests one extra advantage of role-play: promote cooperation and competition between both genders and motivate them to improve their English.

*5.1.5 Similarities among Participants*

The findings revealed numerous overlaps between the participants' perceptions and experience with implementing role-play. Those overlaps were elaborated in the following aspects: teacher participants, student participants and teacher with student participants.

*5.1.5.1 Teacher Participants*

Despite their individual variations such as age, gender, and their different educational and professional backgrounds, teacher participants were in agreement on their lack and need of training for using role-play, their recognition of the effectiveness and weakness of role-play, their solutions to deal with some problems, and their awareness of the certain roles and tasks they have during implementation, though to different degrees.

*5.1.5.2 Student Participants*

Despite their individual differences such as age, gender, proficiency level, the student participants agreed with the following:

1) Their teachers are hardworking and are using role-play satisfactorily

2) Role-play is effective in facilitating their EFL learning process in many ways the most outstanding of which is to motivate them to communicate in relaxing and authentic cultural contexts.

3) Their teachers need more training in the field

4) They want to try different role-play materials in different classes

5) They want to try various levels of role-play but show a preference of doing more advanced and communicative improvisations regardless of their proficiency levels.

6) There are certain problems both their teachers and themselves felt hard to deal with, especially the unwillingness to participate which result from a list of reasons such as climate, workload or boring materials.

### 5.1.5.3 Teacher and Student Participants

The previous two comparisons have revealed numerous overlaps between teacher and students participant, while the most outstanding two were their awareness of the values and drawbacks of role-play in EFL classrooms and their needs for help to overcome students' unwillingness to participate. This similarity demonstrated the importance to deal with such a problem and motivated me to elaborate on future research in the implementation section of the current study for possible solutions.

### 5.1.6 Differences between Participants

As shown from the study, distinctions emerged between participants in their perceptions and role-play performance with their individual backgrounds. I would like to elaborate the differences further between teacher participants, student participants and teacher and student participants.

### 5.1.6.1 Teacher Participants

The table of each teacher is restated here to remind the reader the individual background of each participant. In my view, most of these listed indicators led to the differences among the participants in their perceptions and performance.

| Name | Grade | Years of Teaching | Degree Obtained | Training | Attitudes toward training | Students' comment |
|------|-------|-------------------|-----------------|----------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Li | 7 | 19 | M.Ed. | Some | theoretical training | NT: 0 |
| | | | B1 | Little | | NNT: 6 |
| Fang | 8 | 10 | B1 | Little | theoretical & pedagogical | NT: 3 |
| | | | | | | NNT: 3 |
| Lian | 8 | 14 | M.Ed. | Some | theoretical & pedagogical | NT: 0 |
| | | | B1 | Little | | NNT: 6 |
| Ding | 9 | 9 | B2 | Little | theoretical & pedagogical | NT: 2 |
| | | | | | | NNT: 4 |
| Huang | 11 | 8 | M.Ed. | Some | theoretical & pedagogical | NT: 4 |
| | | | B1 | Little | | NNT: 2 |
| Kong | 10 | 5 | B2 | Some | theoretical & pedagogical | NT: 1 |
| | | | | | | NNT: 5 |
| Wang | 8 | 3 | B1 | Little | theoretical & pedagogical | NT: 5 |
| | | | | | | NNT: 1 |

*Fig. 13: Teacher participants*

Notes: B1: Bachelor's of Arts in EFL teaching      B2: Bachelor's of Arts in English literature or business English
NT: Need Training                                        NNT: Not need

The data collected suggest that the teachers with a M.Ed (Li & Lian) have a better

theoretical training of role-play, though Huang with an M.Ed and 8 years of teaching

experience was deemed by 4 students to need training as opposed to 2 who thought she

didn't need more training. Generally, compared with the other teachers, they had a better understanding of role-play with its features and types as well as have a better role-play implementation concerning dealing with problems, utilizing various types of role-play with diverse materials to teach integrated skills as well as performing more roles during their classroom practice. Such a finding emphasized the significance of theoretical training of role-play.

Kong and Wang were both young and had less working experience. Moreover, Kong even had no B.ED while Wang did. However, it seemed that Kong utilized role-play in a more effective way. As shown from the interview answers, Kong had taken an elective course on role-play and she claimed she loves the technique and mentioned she always observed experienced teachers' classes. She had already started trying innovative ways such as "teacher in the role" for role-play implementation. Her case not only proved the significance of both theoretical and professional development for teachers, but also demonstrated that the teacher's attitude and innovation play an important role in the improvement of role-play implementation.

### 5.1.6.2 Student Participants

While generally speaking, most students have common perceptions regarding the use of role-play, distinctions still arose between different proficiency levels and the differences could be seen from the following aspects:

First, the students from lower grades were more satisfied with their teachers' implementation and with the types of role-play they used in class while the students from higher levels placed more demands on their teachers.

Second, the students from lower grades were more enthusiastic about the technique while the students from higher grades were more bored with the technique due to the workload and the overuse of role-play.

Third, the classrooms of the lower grades were much noisier than the higher levels.

Fourth, the students in the lower grades needed to be reminded to use note-taking skills while the students from higher grades seemed already to have had formed the learning habits for that.

### 5.1.6.3 Teacher and Student Participants

Compared with the students, teachers were more satisfied with the diversity of the teaching materials and topics for using role-play, though, most their students despite the proficiency level expected to use resources out of the textbooks. Moreover, students from lower grades expected to perform more improvised role-plays while their teachers thought sometimes the tasks for improvisation might be too challenging for them, which, as I mentioned earlier, challenged Hine's (1978) view that a teacher-written skit with repeated use of a structure was one of the best role-playing activities for beginning and intermediate students. Such differences reminded classroom teachers to consider the students' individual needs and comfort levels while using role-play.

### 5.1.7 Reflections on Chinese EFL Education Trends

Chinese EFL teaching trends seemed to be reflected in the Chinese teachers and students throughout this research. For instance, as I mentioned earlier, the goal of EFL education is shifting from linguistic competence to communicative competence and the mode of teaching from single skill development to integrated skills training. This change could be seen from the teaching materials used in EFLS in which priority has been given

to the exchange of information. Another important trend reflected is that despite the favorable reforms and changes that have been made, the adoption of CLT has been constrained by several factors caused by China's special situation. One is called the academic factor (Hui, 1997) which referred to the lack of sufficient knowledge and ability of teachers to apply CLT. This trend was also reflected in the study as I have found that although all teachers believe they used communicative role-play, some of the role-plays they used belonged to the audio-lingual approach. Apparently, they need to have a clear distinction between the two approaches and thus ensure the effective use of real communicative role-plays.

Generally speaking, there were a lot of findings concerning the central phenomenon: how can Chinese EFL teachers make effective use of role-play and they helped to address the specific concerns to answer this broad question; namely, how role-play is implemented by Chinese EFL teachers and what issues they need to consider to make effective use of role-play. These findings have given me detailed information from classroom settings and offered me a fuller sense of the central phenomenon.

### 5.2 The Author's Commentary

The interpretation and the analysis of the data collected helped me to address my research questions in three ways.

First, it helped me to validate my basic assumption that "role-play needs to be widely mooted, as the benefits are aplenty" (Kaur, 2002, p.2) and it did have a place in EFL classrooms with specific cultural contexts. Although my study did not focus on hypothesis testing but on the perceptions and experience on teachers about the implementation, and the authentic classroom contexts, the information obtained offered me abundant evidence of the strengths of role-play in EFL classrooms and proved my

assumption that role-play is an ideal technique that could facilitate students' English learning in all aspects. Such findings again validated my belief as a role-play implementer and proved that my research was meaningful.

Secondly, the shared successful and unsuccessful experiences of the teachers as well as the valuable suggestions from the students' sides had proved my another assumption that "explanation and practice of both verbal and non-verbal behavior in the target language is key to laying the groundwork and the students' success in role-playing activities" (Maxwell, 1997, p.4) and emphasized that role-play places a high demands on the teachers' sides. Such first hand information demonstrates the significance of my study which takes place in real classroom settings and also encouraged me to draw up a list of suggestions for classroom practice and future research on role-play, which I will present later in this chapter.

Thirdly, the study has helped me to develop a more specific idea of the role-play implementation in China. From the data analysis, I found that the teachers and their students shared their perceptions and experiences of role-play implementation in distinct areas including types of role-play used in class; topics and materials used for role-play; effectiveness of role-play in teaching and learning English; problems encountered in classes and the related solutions; and roles and tasks of teachers in conducting role-play and their training background concerning role-play. All these areas became the themes for me to present, and when I analyzed the results of my study, I was able finally to incorporate them into a framework for a consideration of role-play implementation in EFL classrooms in China. The findings of each theme have helped me to answer particular concerns about the central question: how can Chinese EFL teachers make effective use of role-play.

Fourthly and most importantly, the findings of the research revealed the significance of cultural dimension of EFL education. These findings demonstrated significance of my proposed EFL teaching approach: CRCLT (the culturally-responsive communicative approach), which could compensate the limitation of the current dominant communicative language teaching approach in the limitation of addressing only one or two cultures. Moreover, they suggested that role-play could be integrated to enhance the students' intercultural awareness if skilfully designed. This finding offered me much more confidence in situating myself as a culturally responsive researcher and motivated me to continuously explore innovative approaches that consider EFL teachers' and students' cultural concerns in EFL classrooms.

In the following section of this chapter, I summarize some of these findings which I perceive to be of interest to Chinese EFL teachers and students as well as researchers in fields like second language acquisition, communicative teaching approach and role-play.

The next section of this chapter proceeds into the researchers' recommendations for classroom teachers, teacher education, and educational authorities in China.

## 5.3 Recommendations on the Implications

### 5.3.1 Classroom Teachers

First, teachers need to understand that role-playing activities take a variety of forms and each type can be used in different themes or content based classrooms. They need to identify general teaching approaches behind each type and make a distinction between the audio-lingual level role-play and total communicative role-play. They should also consider the possibility of integrating more improvised role-playing activities with their students at the beginner or intermediate level on the condition that they provide sufficient cultural, content and grammar instruction for their students.

Second, teachers should be aware that language acquisition is in fact a process in which different language skills are "best assumed to develop simultaneously and to complement each other throughout the process" (Stern,1983, p. 399). They should pay attention not to limit their use of role-play with the teaching of the language knowledge only. As Maxwell (1997) advocates, teachers need to think of ways to incorporate role-play into different themes of courses instead of just the oral English classes.

Third, teachers should attach importance to the students who do not participate willingly in role-playing activities. They are supposed to take the responsibility to help these students, both by giving them more opportunities in class such as assigning them into more active groups or making a dialogue with them, also by hearing their voice after class to know the real reason behind their silence and thinking of the best ways to help them. Just as Peck (1991, 364) claimed that teachers should individualize their instruction so that they teach in the ways in which their students learn. (As cited in Carmichael, 2002, ¶2).

Fourth, EFL teachers should pay attention to their students' individual needs and use a wide variety of instructional strategies that both help to improve the students' language proficiency and maintain their cultural identity and heritage. They should remember that their instruction should be based on differences, "in an effort to dwell in the uniqueness of the individual while giving him/her the tools to live in the larger community" (Martel, 1991, as cited in Pinar et al., 1995, p.437). A good strategy that I recommend is the cultural comparison strategy used for CRCLT (the proposed culturally responsive communicative teaching that I propose), which allows students to compare differences between their native culture and Western culture while still practising the target language. For instance, the teacher can introduce in English some necessary

vocabulary and phrases about the traditional native festivals besides the Western festivals in the textbook and ask the students to compare the differences of these festivals through various levels of role-play. By doing this, the students might develop understanding of the new culture, and improve their knowledge of their own culture. Most importantly, their cultural references have been protected and they will feel more comfortable with learning the new language and culture. Besides this cultural comparison strategy, the additional instruction from teachers of other disciplines (music, science and social studies) may also be a powerful resource to help students develop cross-cultural awareness. For instance, if the given text is an English poem about the Moon, the teacher can invite the native language arts teacher to give a short presentation about similar poems about the moon in the native language. By doing this, the students not only learn the new knowledge of the Western poem, but also review the tradition of the poetry of their own culture and learn to respect their cultural heritage.

Fifth, teachers should pay attention to grammar instruction in the class in which they could use role-play. They should carefully design the activities not only to improve the students' oral English, but also to practice the grammatical knowledge they need to grasp according to the teaching objectives. They should first get thoroughly familiar with the text, make judgments on what students know and what they don't know and then design the role-playing activities in which students can learn and reinforce grammatical knowledge communicatively. Sato's (2001) idea that each role-play needs a grammar focus for students to practice might be a good option for teachers to use role-play to improve students' grammatical knowledge.

To conclude, I would like to cite Xiao's claim that "in the process of devising the teaching methods, teachers have to develop their own awareness and competence in both

pedagogical and methodological sense (Xiao, 2006, Conclusion, ¶3). Teachers should try their best to use of every available resources, either established programs, given workshops, or international conferences, or expert suggested literature to be better trained for role-play and strive for more innovations in the field.

### 5.3.2 Teacher educators

As seen from the study, teachers lacked theoretical support for their use of role-play, not only the theoretical knowledge of role-play, but also for the teaching approaches behind the use of it. This reflected a common problem with teacher education in China, where teachers are only trained to speak English and to teach English grammatical knowledge instead of instructing their students how to communicate with the language. Therefore, I have the following three suggestions for teacher educators in China.

First, the textbooks for teacher education must be improved and changed. Significance should be given to equip teachers with the most updated language and language teaching theories and pedagogies.

Second, the teaching practicum of the pre-service program needs to be valued equally to the writing tests. The teachers need to be given opportunities to link theory to practice by employing different teaching approaches and techniques during the practicum. In addition offering pre-service teachers opportunities to attend conferences, and observe the experienced teachers' classes is also a good way to help them locate themselves in real classroom settings and become more prepared for their future career.

Third, training courses either in particular compulsory programs or optional courses at teacher' college and workshops for teachers in service should be arranged. A forum for teachers using role-play should be established and teachers' needs for

theoretical and practical support should be addressed. Considering the time and workload constraint, teachers' colleges and schools might offer annual seminars for teachers to make role-play more accessible for teachers.

### 5.3.3 Educational Administrators

My study has proved that role-play is an effective teaching technique to facilitate different aspects of students' English learning if effectively used. However, the fact remains that it is only used regularly in a limited number of special language schools. The teachers outside these schools need more support and resources to begin their role-play journey. In my view, the Chinese educational authorities should make the following three attempts to help those teachers and thus promote role-play to be used widely throughout the country.

First, the traditional testing system for English needs to be changed in China. Although it is not easy to make the changes overnight, the authorities should still encourage and promote the changes step by step. Only by doing this, can communicative teaching approaches come to be used more widely among schools in China, and role-play can have a more prominent place in EFL education.

Second, along with the testing system, efforts should be devoted to the improvement and revision of commonly used test-oriented curriculum with the focus on real communication in English instead of on instruction of knowledge about the language and its grammar system. A variety of extended classroom activities might be included in the textbooks and detailed instructions of how to do role-play should be included in the teachers' books.

Third, the teacher preparation system needs to be updated with more sufficient theoretical and professional knowledge concerning the teaching approaches. Teachers

should be educated with not only the general teaching approaches that include the use of role-play, but also the pedagogical strategies of implementing them through both theoretical and practical training.

Fourth, the teacher recruiting system needs to be stricter. Even for the schools that lack English teachers, where the recruiting system is not very strict, those teachers who can only speak English but not have sufficient academic teaching background should be offered special training to help them grasp more skills to use role-play.

Last but not the least, intercultural and international communication between teachers and researchers should be encouraged and opportunities should be given for Chinese EFL teachers to learn and observe role-play implementation by experienced foreign teachers. International conferences, workshops, programs and research studies should be promoted by the education administrators to offer teachers more resources for using role-play.

### 5.4 Sample Role-play Adapted to Different English Courses

To provide classroom teachers more detailed example of how to use various types of role-play to facilitate their students' language acquisition, I proposed an integrated role-play project called "Christmas", which is divided into three units: culture introduction & reading, listening & speaking, and writing. Each unit has the same subject "Christmas", but the role-play used in each unit moves from more structured activities to less structured and improvised activities. Each unit is analyzed within the framework of teachers' roles and responsibilities presented respectively by Roskos (1995) and Milroy (1982), which I have discussed in the previous part. In such a project, role-play is integrated into different types of English courses and serves as a building block of previous lessons to enhance students' verbal and nonverbal communication. The project

is designed for EFL students of grade 9 whose English level is at the transition stage from beginners to intermediate level. Moreover, although the students know something about Christmas through media, they have no systematic knowledge about the culture and customs related to this festival.

"As language and culture are integrated, language cannot be taught without culture. If introduced carefully, role-play can be very effective for experiencing cultural principles and cultural awareness because it gives an opportunity to be emotionally involved in cross-cultural learning and reflect upon cultural differences" (Kodotchigova, 2001, p.5). However, unfortunately, this effectiveness of role-play has been ignored by many EFL teachers using role-play, and they always begin their role-play with introduction of grammar or vocabulary, but neglect necessary culture background information, which is really important. Therefore, my project starts with an explicit introduction of culture background of "Christmas". The activities of different units of such a project were presented afterwards as APPENDIX N.

The role-play project "Christmas" aims to offer teachers using or to use role-play a better understanding of this activity, and provide them with some ideas of how to integrate role-play activities into different themes/or content based English classes effectively. However, as language teaching is complicated, it can not be illustrated just by using one or two samples. Teachers should be aware that such a project is not omnipotent and is limited by many factors such as students' proficiency level and time limits. For instance, in the writing unit, the teacher may find difficulty in having every group to show their compositions through projector or allowing every group to perform their stories if there are too many groups of the class due to time limits. The problems can be solved either by giving two classes for the project, or asking some groups instead of all groups to

act out their stories. In conclusion, teachers should pay attention to their students' needs and adjust their way of using role-play to best facilitate the students' learning. My project only serves as a sample which aims to offer classroom teachers an example of integrating role-play into EFL classrooms as well as encourage their innovations in the implementation of role-play in EFL classes.

### 5.5. Concluding Remarks

#### 5.5.1 Overview of the Study

My personal educational and professional experience with role-play application has led me to this particular case study exploring the Chinese EFL teachers' role-play implementation in secondary schools. The data were collected in various ways including individual and focus group interviews, direct classroom observations, field notes of observations and supplementary questionnaires. The interpretations and the analysis of the data validated my assumption that role-play does have a place in EFL education as long as it is conducted in a thoughtful way. It also showed that role-play places great demands on the skills and abilities of classroom teachers and brought forward a variety of issues teachers need to consider while using role-play to facilitate their students' all aspects of communicative competence including intercultural awareness in language acquisition process. Outcomes of the study include a sample role-play project and a series of recommendations that are helpful to teachers, administrators and teacher training program developers to create a better situation to encourage the use of role-play both effectively and communicatively.

#### 5.5.2 Significance

The study offered valuable information on specific issues such as, whether role-play is a useful teaching method for EFL teachers and how teachers can make

effective use of it. As the study was conducted inside walls of real classrooms, it provides a particular perspective from EFL teachers in China on role-play implementation in their classroom practice and makes role-play more accessible for EFL teachers who have little experience and knowledge of it. Moreover, the data analysis suggested that there were essential common elements shared by the seven teachers and perhaps by the other EFL teachers as well. Therefore, it is not only valuable to EFL teachers in China, but also to the teachers in other countries.

Moreover, the study included a proposed innovative teaching approach called CRCLT (Culturally Responsive Communicative Teaching) which is the next expected step for Chinese EFL teachers and the teachers working in non-English speaking countries to promote their students' intercultural awareness and compensate the constraints of current dominant CLT. The results of the study proved the significance of the cultural dimension of EFL education as well as the values of role-play to promote CRCLT.

Last but not the least, besides a series of practical recommendations for the implication of the study, the research also discussed a project serving as a sample which aims to offer classroom teachers an example of integrating role-play into EFL classrooms as well as encourage their innovations in the implementation of role-play in EFL classes.

Hopefully, with all the outcomes mentioned above, my study will promote further discussion about the issues teachers need to consider in their practice both in and outside China and encourage further research and innovation in this particular field.

*5.5.2 Concluding Remarks*

It is quite interesting that upon finishing writing this role-play project, my student Chun's image hunted me. While using Drake (1993)'s "story model" to explore the personal, cultural and global stories related to my role-play research process, I have for many times recalled my story with Chun, which demonstrated the limitations of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) of addressing only one culture (Hymes,1980; Byram & Fleming 1998; Nunn, 2005) and the overemphasis of role-play while ignoring students' individual needs (Kaur, 2002).While doing this research, especially when I observed Ding's class during which she asked her students to compare different superstitions in different cultures, I couldn't help thinking what would have happened if I had introduced both Christmas and Spring Festival at the same time in my EFL classes and how Chun would react. Interestingly enough, the findings of this particular role-play research had provided me with the answers and emphasized the potential of my proposed CRCLT approach to alleviate those problems.

Therefore, at this point, my future plan is to become a culturally responsive teacher and researcher to improve the use of role-play and other related extended activities for EFL/ESL education. I hope my research will open a new window onto the understanding of role-play and CRCLT (Culturally Responsive Communicative Language Teaching) as an alternative way for all EFL teachers (both native Chinese EFL teachers and teachers from English-speaking countries) to deal with specific cultural contexts. Hopefully, as a result, there might be an increased use of role-play in China and the use of role-play will not only be limited to address the culture of the target language. Although these changes will not take place overnight, I believe my study will contribute to promote innovations and changes to improve our current situation in China.

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# APPENDIX A

## Pre-observation Interview Guide to Teacher Participants (Grade 7-10)

(1) How many years have you been teaching English? How many years have you been using role-play?

(2) How did you know the term "role-play"? Why do you use role-play to teach English?

(3) Have you received formal training (theoretical/pedagogical) on how to use role-play in your class? Do you feel you need more theoretical and pedagogical support in implementing role-play in your class?

(4) How often do you use role-play in your class (frequently, nearly every class)?

(5) Do you use role-play in different themes of classes? Which type of classes do you use role-play more frequently? Why?

(6) What kind of role-play do you usually use?
E.g.
Perform sample dialogues on textbooks
Make minor changes based on given phrases
Make changes based on given sentence structures
Create a conversation based on given scenarios (e.g. a customer and the manager at a hotel)
Create a conversation based on a broad topic (Spring Festival)

(7) What factors affect your decision on which type of role-play you choose (student language proficiency level, course material; your experience)? Which kind of role-play do you like to use?

(8) Do you think that role-play is applicable for teaching students of all proficiency levels (beginner, intermediate, advanced)? Why or why not?

(9) What course materials do you usually use to conduct role-play in your class?

(10) What are the problems you find with role-play in general? What are your attempts to solve those problems? Are they helpful or not?

(11) Do you think it is plausible to incorporate role-play to teach grammar? Do you think it necessary to give grammar instruction before or after the use of role-play? Why or why not?

(12) Do you have the feedback session after the students' performance? Do you think it is necessary or not?

(13) What do you think are the teachers' roles and responsibilities in running a role-play?

(14) What do you think are the necessary tasks teachers need to finish in running a role-play?

(15)What are your suggestions on planning the procedure?

(16) What advantages do you see to include role-play into the EFL curriculum in China?

(17) What suggestions do you have regarding the preparation of teachers to use the role-play technique?

(18) What do you expect to change in the near future regarding the use of role-play in your class/regarding activities used in your EFL classroom? And in EFL curriculum in China?

(19) Do you meet any barriers from the parents? Or from other sources (the school administration, facilities, time limit)?

(20) Any gender differences shown in the role-play performance in your class? Why or why not?

(21) Do you have anything to add about your experience applying role-play in your EFL classes?

**APPENDIX B**

**Post-observation Interview Guide to Teacher Participants (Grade 7-10)**

(1) What is the type of the given class? (listening, speaking, reading, writing) What is the teaching objective of this class?

(2) What type of role-play did you use in this class? Why did you choose this type? (Class type, student proficiency level, your experience)?

(3) To what extent did the role-play meet the objectives of the class? Any objectives not met?

(4) What were the positive elements of the role-play in this class? Any disadvantages?

(5) How did you plan this lesson? Any special procedures and techniques to share?

(6) What challenges did you experience in this role-play lesson?

(7) If any, what did you do to solve the problems? Were they helpful or not?

(8) Were there any problems that you failed to deal with? Why or why not?

(9) What were your roles and responsibilities in this class? Did you give any grammar instruction in this class before the use of role-play? Why or why not?

(10) I have noticed that you had (or had not) included the feedback session after the students' performance. Do you think the feedback session is necessary or not? Why did you include (or not include) the feedback session?

(11) I have noticed that some students performed very actively in your class while some students remained quiet during the role-play performance. Does this always happen in your class? Do you think that is a problem? Did you try to solve this kind of problem? How? Effective or not?

**APPENDIX C**

**Questionnaire to the Teacher Participant (Grade 11)**

(1)  How many years have you been teaching English? How many years have you been using role-play?

(2) How did you know the term "role-play"? Why do you use role-play to teach English?

(3) Have you received formal training (theoretical/pedagogical) on how to use role-play in your class? Do you feel you need more theoretical and pedagogical support in implementing role-play in your class?

(4)  How often do you use role-play in your class (frequently, nearly every class)?

(5) Do you use role-play in different themes of classes? Which type of classes do you use role-play more frequently? Why?

(6) What kind of role-play do you usually use?
E.g.
Perform sample dialogues on textbooks
Make minor changes based on given phrases
Make changes based on given sentence structures
Create a conversation based on given scenarios (e.g. a customer and the manager at a hotel)
Create a conversation based on a broad topic (Spring Festival)

(7) What factors affect your decision on which type of role-play you choose (student language proficiency level, course material; your experience)? Which kind of role-play do you like to use?

(8) Do you think that role-play is applicable for teaching students of all proficiency levels (beginner, intermediate, advanced)? Why or why not?

(9) What course materials do you usually use to conduct role-play in your class?

(10) What are the problems you find with role-play in general? What are your attempts to solve those problems? Are they helpful or not?

(11) Do you think it is plausible to incorporate role-play to teach grammar? Do you think it necessary to give grammar instruction before or after the use of role-play? Why or why not?

(12) Do you have the feedback session after the students' performance? Do you think it is necessary or not?

(13) What do you think are the teachers' roles and responsibilities in running a role-play?

(14) What do you think are the necessary tasks teachers need to finish in running a role-play?

(15) What are your suggestions on planning the procedure?

(16) What advantages do you see to include role-play into the EFL curriculum in China?

(17) What suggestions do you have regarding the preparation of teachers to use the role-play technique?

(18) What do you expect to change in the near future regarding the use of role-play in your class/regarding activities used in your EFL classroom? And in EFL curriculum in China?

(19) Do you meet any barriers from the parents? Or from other sources (the school administration, facilities, time limit)?

(20) Any gender differences shown in the role-play performance in your class? Why or why not?

(21) Do you have anything to add about your experience applying role-play in your EFL classes?

**APPENDIX D**

**Pre-observation Interview Guide to Student Participants (Grade 7-10)**

(1) How many years have you been learning English? How many years have you been doing role-play?

(2) Did you do role-play more frequently than before or not? Why?

(3) How did you learn the term "role-play"? Do you know why you have to do role-play in this school?

(4) How often do your teacher use role-play in class? Do you think that is sufficient or not? Why?

(5) Do your teacher and peers give you feedbacks after the role-play performance? Do you think that is necessary or not?

(6) What type of role-play does your teacher usually ask you to do in class? What type of classes does your teacher use role-play more frequently? (listening, speaking, reading, writing). What is your comment?

Perform sample dialogues on textbooks
Make minor changes based on given phrases
Make changes based on given sentence structures
Create a conversation based on the given scenario (e.g. The customer and the manager at a hotel)
Create a conversation based on a broad topic (Christmas)

(7) Do you think it is plausible to incorporate role-play to teach grammar? Do you think it is necessary to give grammar instruction before or after the use of role-play? Why or why not?

(8) Do you like this teaching technique? Why or why not?

(9) Do you think that role-play can help you to learn English? Or do you think it is more like games?

(10) What are the difficulties you meet with doing role-play? What attempts do you make to solve the problems?

(11) What help do you expect your teacher to give you to do role-play? Do you get enough help?

(12) What suggestions do you have for your teachers regarding the use of role-play?

(13) Do you think your teacher is qualified to use role-play in your class? Do you think they have been trained (theoretically or pedagogically) to use role-play?

(14) Have you ever talked about role-play with your parents? What are their attitudes?

(15) Any gender differences shown in the role-play performance in your classes? Does your teacher try anything to balance?

**APPENDIX E**

**Post-observation Interview Guide to Student Participants (Grade 7-10)**

(1) What type of role-play did your teacher use in this class? How do you like this type of role-play?

(2) Why type is this class? (listening, speaking, reading, writing)

(3) What were the positive elements of the role-play in this class? Any disadvantages?

(4) What do you think were the objectives of this class? To what extent did the role-play meet the objectives of the class? Any objectives not met?

(5) What challenges did you experience in this role-play lesson?

(6) If any, what did you do to solve the problems? Were they helpful or not?

(7) Were there any problems you failed to deal with? Why or why not?

(8) What help did you expect your teacher to give you to do this role-play? Did you get enough help?

(9) What suggestions do you have for your teachers regarding the use of role-play in this class?

( 10 ) I have noticed that your teacher had (or had not) included the feedback session after the students' performance. Do you think the feedback session is necessary or not?

(11 I have noticed that some students performed very actively in your class while some students remained quiet during the role-play performance. Does this always happen in your class? Does your teacher do anything to solve this problem? How? Effective or not?

**APPENDIX F**

**Questionnaire to the Student Participant (Grade 11)**

(1) How many years have you been learning English? How many years have you been doing role-play?

(2) Did you do role-play more frequently than before or not? Why?

(3) How did you learn the term "role-play"? Do you know why you have to do role-play in this school?

(4)How often do your teacher use role-play in class? Do you think that is sufficient or not? Why?

(5) Do your teacher and peers give you feedbacks after the role-play performance? Do you think that is necessary or not?

(6) What type of role-play does your teacher usually ask you to do in class? What type of classes does your teacher use role-play more frequently? (Listening, speaking, reading, writing). What is your comment?

Perform sample dialogues on textbooks
Make minor changes based on given phrases
Make changes based on given sentence structures
Create a conversation based on the given scenario (eg. The customer and the manager at a hotel)
Create a conversation based on a broad topic (Christmas)

(7) Do you think it is plausible to incorporate role-play to teach grammar? Do you think it is necessary to give grammar instruction before or after the use of role-play? Why or why not?

(8) Do you like this teaching technique? Why or why not?

(9) Do you think that role-play can help you to learn English? Or do you think it is more like games?

(10) What are the difficulties you meet with doing role-play? What attempts do you make to solve the problems?

(11) What help do you expect your teacher to give you to do role-play? Do you get enough help?


(12) What suggestions do you have for your teachers regarding the use of role-play?


(13) Do you think your teacher is qualified to use role-play in your class? Do you think they have been trained (theoretically or pedagogically) to use role-play?


(14) Have you ever talked about role-play with your parents? What are their attitudes?

(15) Any gender differences shown in the role-play performance in your classes? Does your teacher try anything to balance?

**APPENDIX G**



University of Windsor

**THE PRINCIPAL'S CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**TITLE OF THE STUDY**
Investigating Role-play Implementation: A Multiple Case Study on Chinese EFL
Teachers Using Role-play in Their Secondary Classrooms
Your EFL teachers and students are asked to participate in a research study conducted by
Yi Lin, a PhD student in Education Studies from the Faculty of Education at the
University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada. The results will be contributed to my
PhD dissertation: An Investigation of Role-play Usage in EFL Classrooms in China.
If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact either
me at XXXXXXX.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**
There are two purposes to my study: 1) to investigate the use of role-play in EFL
classrooms and identify issues that emerge from the use of role-play as an EFL instruction
technique and 2) to identify the perspectives from Chinese EFL teachers in their
classroom practice and develop more understanding of the use of role-play in Chinese
EFL education. As a method of dissemination, I will offer EFL teachers with limited
experience and knowledge of role-play pedagogical support of what is meant by role-play
in EFL education; and initiate a further discussion among EFL teachers on the use of
role-play as a teaching role-play in EFL classrooms as a teaching technique and thereby
shed new light on existing research on role-play in language education.

**PROCEDURES**
If your teachers and students volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask them to
do the following things:
I plan to conduct an initial interview with your teachers independently and their students
in focus groups asking general questions on role-play to explore their thoughts and
comments on using role-play. Then I will observe two of their EFL classes using
role-play in a natural setting and their classes will be audio-taped with the permission of
three sides (teachers, students/maybe their parents if necessary and you). The observation
will last the same length of time as the classes. After that, I will show each of them the
tapes of their classes implementing role-play and interview them with more specific
questions regarding the classes observed. There will be two interviews which last about
an hour. The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed for later analysis. Field notes
will be taken during and following both interviews and the classes. All participants will
be given pseudonyms to protect confidentiality and all documents will be kept
confidential.
The interviews will take place in a place at your school where the participants

find most convenient and comfortable. It could be the classroom or the conference room at school. The classroom observation will be conducted in the classroom with the permission from three sides (teachers, students and you)

## POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
No potential risks and discomforts will result from my study.

## POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY
This research might benefit the teachers and students in that it draws attention to the issue of role-play implementation in EFL classrooms in China. It raises a series of suggestions and recommendations for teachers and language educators to have a better understanding of how teachers can make effective use of role-play. The role-play implementation might be improved in your school.
As the study will be conducted inside the walls of existing classrooms, it will provide a particular perspective from EFL teachers in China on the use of role-play in their classrooms and may offer EFL teachers with little experience and knowledge of role-play a better understanding of what role-play means in EFL education. Moreover, the data analysis may suggest that there are essential common elements shared by these teachers and perhaps by other EFL teachers as well. Therefore, it is not only valuable to EFL teachers and students in China, but also to those in other countries. Hopefully, the study will promote further discussion about the issues teachers need to consider in their practice both inside and outside of China and encourage further research and innovations in this particular field.

## PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION
This research is a non-profit project and the participants will not receive payment for participation.

## CONFIDENTIALITY
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with the participants in your school will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with the permission from three sides (teachers, students and you).
Pseudonyms will be provided and background information will only contain general descriptors to identify the role rather than an individual.
Recordings and transcripts will be stored in a secure spot and all recordings and transcripts and other information gathered about subjects will be used only for educational purposes and will be destroyed within 5 years of the study.
As participants of the project, the teachers and students have the right to review/edit the transcript of the audio-tapes of interviews classroom role-play implementation.

## PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
The participants can choose whether to be in this study or not. If they volunteer to be in this study, they may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.   They may also refuse to answer any questions they do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw them from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

**FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE SUBJECTS**
A written version reporting my research findings will be available to you and the participants and will be either mailed to your school address or e-mailed to you after my dissertation has been defended.
Web address: _____
Date when results are available:      September, 2009

**SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA**
This data may be used in subsequent studies regarding the use of role-play in Chinese EFL classrooms.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**
The participants may withdraw their consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have questions regarding their rights as a research subject, contact:   Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: ethics@uwindsor.ca

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE**
I understand the information provided for the study "An Investigation of Role-play Usage in EFL Classrooms in China" as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I allow the study to take place in my school.
I have been given a copy of this form.


_____
       Name of Principal


_____        _____
       Signature of Principal                                      Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.


_____        _____
       Signature of Investigator                                 Date

Revised February 2008

**APPENDIX H**



University of Windsor

**TEACHERS' CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**TITLE OF THE STUDY**

Investigating Role-play Implementation: A Multiple Case Study on Chinese EFL
Teachers Using Role-play in Their Secondary Classrooms
You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Yi Lin, a PhD student in
Education Studies from the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor, Windsor,
Ontario, Canada. The results will be contributed to my PhD dissertation: An Investigation
of Role-play Usage in EFL Classrooms in China.
If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact either
me at XXXXXXX.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

There are two purposes to my study: 1) to investigate the use of role-play in EFL
classrooms and identify issues that emerge from the use of role-play as an EFL instruction
technique and 2) to identify the perspectives from Chinese EFL teachers in their
classroom practice and develop more understanding of the use of role-play in Chinese
EFL education. As a method of dissemination, I will offer EFL teachers with limited
experience and knowledge of role-play pedagogical support of what is meant by role-play
in EFL education; and initiate a further discussion among EFL teachers on the use of
role-play as a teaching role-play in EFL classrooms as a teaching technique and thereby
shed new light on existing research on role-play in language education.

**PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
I plan to conduct an initial interview with you asking general questions on role-play to
explore your thoughts and comments on using role-play. Then I will observe two of your
EFL classes using role-play in a natural setting and your classes will be audio-taped with
your permission. The observation will last the same length of time as your classes. After
that, I will show each of you the tapes of your classes implementing role-play and
interview you with more specific questions regarding the classes observed. There will be
two interviews which last about an hour for each of you. The interviews will be audio
taped and transcribed for later analysis. Field notes will be taken during and following
both interviews and the classes. You will be given pseudonyms to protect confidentiality
and all documents will be kept confidential.
The interviews will take place in a place at your school where your find most convenient
and comfortable for you. It could be your classroom or the conference room at school.
The classroom observation will be conducted in your classroom with your permission.

**POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**
No potential risks and discomforts will result from my study.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**
This research might benefit you in that it draws attention to the issue of role-play implementation in EFL classrooms in China. It raises a series of suggestions and recommendations for teachers and language educators to have a better understanding of how teachers can make effective use of role-play. The role-play implementation might be improved in your classroom.
As the study will be conducted inside the walls of existing classrooms, it will provide a particular perspective from EFL teachers in China on the use of role-play in their classrooms and may offer EFL teachers with little experience and knowledge of role-play a better understanding of what role-play means in EFL education. Moreover, the data analysis may suggest that there are essential common elements shared by these teachers and perhaps by other EFL teachers as well. Therefore, it is not only valuable to EFL teachers and students in China, but also to those in other countries. Hopefully, the study will promote further discussion about the issues teachers need to consider in their practice both inside and outside of China and encourage further research and innovations in this particular field.

**PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**
This research is a non-profit project and the participants will not receive payment for participation.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Pseudonyms will be provided to you and background information will only contain general descriptors to identify the role rather than an individual.
Recordings and transcripts will be stored in a secure spot and all recordings and transcripts and other information gathered about subjects will be used only for educational purposes and will be destroyed within 5 years of the study.
As participants of the project, you have the right to review/edit the transcript of the audio-tapes of interviews classroom role-play implementation.

**PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**
You can choose whether to be in this study or not.   If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.   You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

**FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE SUBJECTS**
A written version reporting my research findings will be available to you and will be either mailed to your school address or e-mailed to you after my dissertation has been defended.
Web address: _____

Date when results are available:     <u>September, 2009</u>

**SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA**
This data may be used in subsequent studies regarding the use of role-play in Chinese EFL classrooms.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**
You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: <u>ethics@uwindsor.ca</u>

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE**
I understand the information provided for the study "An Investigation of Role-play Usage in EFL Classrooms in China" as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____
      Name of Subject

_____    _____
      Signature of Subject            Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

_____    _____
      Signature of Investigator           Date

Revised February 2008

**APPENDIX I**

University of Windsor

**STUDENTS' CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**


**TITLE OF THE STUDY**
Investigating Role-play Implementation: A Multiple Case Study on Chinese EFL
Teachers Using Role-play in Their Secondary Classrooms
You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Yi Lin, a PhD student in
Education Studies from the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor, Windsor,
Ontario, Canada. The results will be contributed to my PhD dissertation: An Investigation
of Role-play Usage in EFL Classrooms in China.
If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact either
me at XXXXXXX.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**
There are two purposes to my study: 1) to investigate the use of role-play in EFL
classrooms and identify issues that emerge from the use of role-play as an EFL instruction
technique and 2) to identify the perspectives from Chinese EFL teachers in their
classroom practice and develop more understanding of the use of role-play in Chinese
EFL education. As a method of dissemination, I will offer EFL teachers with limited
experience and knowledge of role-play pedagogical support of what is meant by role-play
in EFL education; and initiate a further discussion among EFL teachers on the use of
role-play as a teaching role-play in EFL classrooms as a teaching technique and thereby
shed new light on existing research on role-play in language education.

**PROCEDURES**
If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
I plan to organize a focus group discussion with you and your peers asking you general
questions on role-play to explore your thoughts and comments on using role-play. Then I
will observe two of your EFL classes using role-play in a natural setting and your classes
will be audio-taped with your teacher and your permission. The observation will last the
same length of time as your classes. After that, I will show each of you the tapes of your
classes implementing role-play and asking you with more specific questions regarding the
classes observed. There will be two focus group discussions which last about an hour
respectively. The discussions will be audio taped and transcribed for later analysis. Field
notes will be taken during and following both discussions and the classes. You will be
given pseudonyms to protect confidentiality and all documents will be kept confidential.
The discussions will take place in a place at your school where your find most convenient
and comfortable for you. It could be your classroom or the conference room at school.
The classroom observation will be conducted in your classroom with your permission.

**POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**
No potential risks and discomforts will result from my study.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**
This research might benefit you in that it draws attention to the issue of role-play implementation in EFL classrooms in China. It raises a series of suggestions and recommendations for teachers and language educators to have a better understanding of how teachers can make effective use of role-play. The role-play implementation might be improved in your classroom.
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**PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**
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**CONFIDENTIALITY**
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As participants of the project, you have the right to review/edit the transcript of the audio-tapes of interviews classroom role-play implementation.

**PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**
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A written version reporting my research findings will be available to you and will be either mailed to your school address or e-mailed to you after my dissertation has been defended.
Web address: _____

Date when results are available:     <u>September, 2009</u>

**SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA**
This data may be used in subsequent studies regarding the use of role-play in Chinese EFL classrooms.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**
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**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE**
I understand the information provided for the study "An Investigation of Role-play Usage in EFL Classrooms in China" as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____
        Name of Subject


_____        _____
        Signature of Subject                         Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.


_____        _____
        Signature of Investigator                     Date

Revised February 2008

**APPENDIX J**

University of Windsor

**PRINCIPAL'S CONSENT FOR AUDIO TAPING**

Principal's Name: _____

Title of the Project:

Investigating Role-play Implementation: A Multiple Case Study on
Chinese EFL Teachers Using Role-play in Their Secondary Classrooms

      I consent to the audio-taping of interviews, procedures, or
treatment of my teachers and students.

      I understand these are voluntary procedures and that they are free
to withdraw at any time by requesting that the taping be stopped.   I also
understand that their names will not be revealed to anyone and that taping
will be kept confidential. Tapes are filed by number only and store in a
locked cabinet.

      I understand that confidentiality will be respected and that the
audio tape will be for professional use only.

_____                    _____

(Signature of Principal)                                (Date)

**APPENDIX K**

University
of Windsor

**PARTICIPANTS' CONSENT FOR AUDIO TAPING**

Research Subject's Name: _____

Title of the Project:

Investigating Role-play Implementation: A Multiple Case Study on
Chinese EFL Teachers Using Role-play in Their Secondary Classrooms

      I consent to the audio-taping of interviews, procedures, or
treatment.

      I understand these are voluntary procedures and that I am free to
withdraw at any time by requesting that the taping be stopped. I also
understand that my name will not be revealed to anyone and that taping
will be kept confidential. Tapes are filed by number only and stored in a
locked cabinet.

I understand that confidentiality will be respected and that the audio tape
will be for professional use only.


_____          _____
(Signature of Research Subject)                    (Date)

**APPENDIX L**



**University of Windsor**

**PARENTS' CONSENT FOR AUDIO TAPING**

Research Subject's Name: _____

Title of the Project:

Investigating Role-play Implementation: A Multiple Case Study on Chinese EFL Teachers Using Role-play in Their Secondary Classrooms

      I understand these are voluntary procedures and that my child is free to withdraw at any time by requesting that the taping be stopped. I also understand that my child's name will not be revealed to anyone and that taping will be kept confidential. Tapes are filed by number only and store in a locked cabinet.

      I understand that confidentiality will be respected and that the audio tape will be for professional use only.

_____      _____
(Signature of Parent or Guardian)          (Date)

**APPENDIX M**

**MATERIALS USED IN DIFFERENT CLASSES OBSERVED**

**Grade 7 Li's Class**
**Welcome to the South West of England**

1. Geography

The South West is the warmest part of the UK. There are some hills in the north near Bristol, but the rest of the area has some very flat parts which are below the sea. There are beaches on both sides of the area.

2. Climate

The climate here is temperate. The winters are warmer than other parts of the UK. The summers are usually warmer and drier than other areas. Some summer days are very hot. It sometimes rains a lot in the spring. It is often windy in the winter.

**Grade 8 Wang & Lian's Class**
**The Football Team**

Task1: What do you think?
    Discuss the questions first in group and then with the class.
    Do boys and girls of your age behave in different ways in the classroom/playground?
    Do boys and girls like the same subjects at school?
    Do boys and girls do the same things after school and at weekends?
Task2: Who do you agree with?
Task 3: Act out the conversation for the class
Task 4: Imagine that Samantha and Rebecca put up another notice and write the notice.

**Fang's Class**
**Slavery**

Slavery existed in the United States for hundreds of years, until 1865. Slaves had no rights at all. They were the property of their owners. They lived in very bad conditions, received minimal amounts of food and were treated very badly. Many slaves tried to escape but, if they were caught, they were punished very hard. Look at the pictures. How would you feel if you were a slave? What would you do?

**Grade 9 Ding's Class**
**Superstition**

**Scorpion**:

Woman: Oh, I saw another scorpion this morning. That's the third scorpion I've seen this week!

Man: Scorpions are coming down from the mountain. The god of the mountain is getting angry. Soon strong winds will begin to blow. Then it will rain. I can tell. Scorpions come, then winds blow, then it rains—whenever the mountain god is angry.

Woman: I don't understand. Why do you think the mountain god is angry?

Man: I learned that story when I was very young. We still watch for scorpions. Scorpions can feel the wind early—and the wind usually starts to blow a couple of weeks before the rainy season starts.

**Milk:**

Woman: In the past, people never lent milk or butter to anyone. It was dangerous. The person might be a witch. He or she could put a magic spell on your cow. And then the cow would stop giving milk.

Man: Never lend milk? Why not?

Woman: Most cultures have proverbs about lending things—you know, warning against it. When proverbs were created—a long time ago, of course—most people were farmers. They were poor and really couldn't lend things. They didn't have very much. So the superstition is really a rule. It means, "Don't lend anything to anyone."

**Grade 10 Kong's Class**
**Is He Ready to Quit?**

Task 1: Number the given pictures with the problem listed.

Picture 1 I want my neighbor's dog to stop barking.

Picture 2 I want my husband to stop snoring.

Picture 3 I want to sleep at night.

Picture 4 I want my son home by 10:30 p.m.

Picture 5 I want to quit smoking.

Task 2: Work with a partner. What advice would you give each person? Decide on a piece of advice for each problem.

Task 3: Brain storm! Work with a partner. What are some other common problems for which people might need advice? Make a list.

**APPENDIX N**

**SAMPLE ROLE-PLAY UNIT**

*Unit1. Culture and reading*

*Preparation*

List the following aspects in order to make clear the education purpose and organize the work with the right situation

*Teaching objectives:*

Help students grasp related vocabulary of "Christmas"; develop their cultural awareness of the most traditional festival; make both grammar and cultural preparation for them to have the necessary reading comprehension, improve their skills of reading and retelling

*Teaching materials:*

A short passage that introduces "Christmas"

*Teaching content:*

Vocabulary of "Christmas"
Cultural background:
 The origin and related stories of Christmas, the religious connotations of Christmas
 Christmas symbols: Santa Claus, Christmas trees, reindeer…
 Christmas customs: exchange gifts, have dinner, sing carols…

*Briefing*

Make all the necessary arrangements for the reading comprehension and the setting-up of role-play in the following-up stage:

*Introduction to the subject: culture and vocabulary*

1) Show students some pictures of Christmas; start a casual conversation with some of the students talking about what they know about Christmas

2) Give the students vocabulary help if they do not know how to say the words in English and thus teach some of the vocabulary which they have already touched in their conversation

3) Summarize what the students have said about Christmas; teach the new words that most students do not know by showing slides of real objects

4) Give the students an explicit introduction of Christmas: its related customs, stories, and symbols

2. Reading comprehension

1) Give the students two or three minutes to know the gist of the text by fast reading

2) Give the students T/ F questions to evaluate if they know the main idea of the text

3) Give the students more time to read the details

4) Give the students exercises such as blank-filling or multiple choices to test if they understand the details of the text

5) Underline the useful phrases of the text and explain the grammar if necessary

3. Warm-up stage

1) Have the students read the text in chorus

2) Give the students sometime to read individually and ask some of them to read to the class

**Interaction**

Assign students roles and have them role-play with a relatively more structured script

1) Assign the students roles as Santa Clause or the reindeer; give them a situation that they have to introduce Christmas to those who know little about Christmas

2) Divide the students into pairs, and have them practice with each other

*Discussion*

Give students' support for the role-play performance and evaluate their role-play

1) Stop by each pair to give them instructions and help

2) Make records of the students' speech and point out their mistakes

3) Give assessment to each pair's performance including both verbal (use of the vocabulary and grammar) and non-verbal behavior (facial expression and gestures)

*Summary*

This unit is designed to develop students' culture awareness of Christmas, the most traditional Western festival; to improve their specific reading skills such as skimming and scanning; and to develop their oral skills such as retelling the text and learn to give introductions in first person. Role-play is integrated into a culture teaching and reading course, and it offers the students a fun and creative way to practice what they have learnt of "Christmas". However, the role-play here is the most structured one of the three units, as the teacher interferes a lot by giving the students vocabulary help, cultural background information and defining the script and scenario for them. Although the students have to make some changes to the text and play the roles, what they do is mainly retelling the story instead of genuine communication. Since the students are still at the transition stage from beginner to intermediate and their knowledge of Christmas is limited, it is improper to give them higher level of role-play at the very beginning. With their increased knowledge of the subject, teachers can design more improvised activities for them, and I am going to describe those activities in the following units.

*Unit 2. Listening & Speaking*

***Preparation***

Listed the following aspects in order to make clear the education purpose and organize the work with the right situation

***Teaching objectives***

Help students grasp related vocabulary of "Christmas"; practice their listening skills such as make predictions and take notes; develop their communicative skills of asking questions and giving responses, and offer them real-life like experience such as giving and receiving an interview

***Teaching materials***

A short listening passage about a reporter interviewing a famous person on what he does during Christmas.

***Teaching content***

Extended vocabulary of "Christmas"
useful phrases and grammar
some specific listening and speaking skills

***Briefing***

Make all the necessary arrangements for the reading comprehension and the setting-up of role-play in the following-up stage

***Introduction to the subject***

1) Start a casual conversation by having them discuss what they want to do if Christmas is celebrated in their country

2) Ask the students if they want to know what the famous person they admire do during Christmas

3) Tell the students they are going to hear a dialogue between a reporter and a star on what the star does during Christmas; have them predict what the two people might say in the dialogue and write down their predictions.

### *Listening comprehension*

1) Play the tape once and ask the students to check how much they have predicted right

2) Play the tape again and ask the students to do T/ F exercise and other simple exercises in order to know whether they get the main idea

3) Play the tape again, but very slowly, with a pause between every sentence and ask the students to write down as much information as they can

4) Play the tape again, and ask them to check their notes.

### *Warm-up stage*

1) Play the tape again, pause between every sentence and have students repeat in chorus

2) Play the tape again, pause between every sentence and have the students repeat individually

3) Have the students read the text again and again until they can memorize most parts of the text

### *Interaction*

Assign students roles and have them role-play with a relatively more structured script

1) Give the students sometime to practice performing the dialogue they have heard

2) Ask the students to perform the roles in the dialogue

3) Introduce to the students necessary verbal and non-verbal skills of interviewing people and being interviewed by others

4) Give the students a situation that they are a reporter and they can interview anybody they want in the world about what they do during Christmas, tell them they can choose to prepare either in pairs or in groups

5) Give them time to prepare

*Discussion*

Give students' support for the role-play performance and evaluate their role-play

1) Stop by each pair to give them instructions and help

2) Make records of the students' speech and point out their mistakes

3) Give assessment to each pair's performance including both their verbal (use of the vocabulary and grammar) and non-verbal behavior (facial expression and gestures)

*Summary*

This unit intends to help students to extend their vocabulary of Christmas; to learn some useful techniques of listening comprehension such as making predictions and taking notes; improve students' communicative skills such as asking questions and making responses as well as offer them the real-life like experience of interviewing people or being interviewed. Role-play here serves as a tool to motivate students to listen and speak as they are offered a chance to interview people they want or pretend to be famous people they like. Besides, it functions as a bridge for students to connect the knowledge they have learnt from the previous culture and reading course with that from the listening and speaking course. Thus, they can practice their new knowledge as well as consolidating their old knowledge. Such a type of role-play is less structured as the students have more freedom to choose their roles. Besides, since the students are interviewing or being

interviewed, their conversations are more like genuine fluid conversation uttered by native speakers. Although they are still limited by the subject on what people do during Christmas, the students do communicate with each other in the target language.

*. Unit 3. Writing*

***Preparation***

Listed the following aspects in order to make clear the education purpose and organize the work with the right situation

***Teaching objectives***

Develop students' creative writing skills on story-writing; improve their communicative competence through the discussion with peers and develop their ability of co-operating with their peers in performing their stories…

**Teaching material**

A sample story of "Christmas"

**Teaching content**

Specific techniques of writing a story, such as creating characters and defining plots

***Briefing***

Make all the necessary arrangements for the reading comprehension and the setting-up of role-play in the following-up stage

***Introduction to the subject***

1) Show the students the sample story related to the festival "Christmas", and then collect their feedbacks on the story

2) Summarize the students' comment on the story and the teacher makes comment on the story in person

3) Introduce to the students how to write a good story

*Writing the subject*

1) Divide the students into groups and ask each group to develop their own story related to Christmas

2) Tell each group that they have freedom to decide the characters, settings, places and plots, but they have to write in proper length

3) Give the students time limit

*Warm-up stage:*

1) Show each group's story via the projector and ask their peers to give evaluations

2) The teacher gives evaluation on each group's writing in person, makes comment on factors such as grammar, the plots and the length

*Interaction*

Have students role-play the script they have written

1) Give the students sometime to edit their story according to the feedbacks they get both from teachers and their peers

2) Have them assign the roles in their story themselves and get ready for the role-play activity

*Discussion*

Give students' support for the role-play performance and evaluate their role-play

1) Stop by each group to give them instructions and help

2) Make records of the students' dialogues and point out their mistakes

3) Give assessment to each group's performance including both their verbal (use of the vocabulary and grammar) and non-verbal behavior (facial expression and gestures)

*Summary*

This unit is designed to develop the students' skills of story-writing. The role-play here is the least structured as the students are not limited by anything except the length and the time. Although they have to write the story about the given topic "Christmas", they can choose the characters and develop the plots as they like. Such an activity is much more challenging then the previous ones as the teacher intervenes rarely and the students have to co-operate with each other in finishing the task all by themselves. Nonetheless, this kind of role-play is still proper for them as they have already experienced the previous three courses on Christmas, and they have already improved their knowledge of Christmas as well as their communicative skills of the target language such as reading, listening and speaking. Based on this fact, the students must have been fully prepared both in grammar and in other aspects and they can take more complicated and less structured activities. In this unit, role-play serves as a tool to consolidate students' knowledge of story-wring as well as motivate them to co-operate and communicate with their peers in English in order to finish the task. Accordingly, although this is a unit of writing, it not only improves students' writing skills, but also the skills in other units such as listening and speaking. The role-play activity here successfully serves as a bridge of all the four units.

*Overview of the "Christmas" role-play project*

The role-play project "Christmas" aims to offer teachers using or to use role-play a better understanding of this activity, and provide them with some ideas of how to integrate role-play activities into different themes/or content based English classes effectively. However, as language teaching is complicated, it can not be illustrated just by using one or two samples. Teachers should be aware that such a project is not omnipotent

and is limited by many factors such as students' proficiency level and time limits. For instance, in the writing unit, the teacher may find difficulty in having every group to show their compositions through projector or allowing every group to perform their stories if there are too many groups of the class due to time limits. The problems can be solved either by giving two classes for the project, or asking some groups instead of all groups to act out their stories. In conclusion, teachers should pay attention to their students' needs and adjust their way of using role-play to best facilitate the students' learning. My project only serves as a sample which aims to offer classroom teachers an example of integrating role-play into EFL classrooms as well as encourage their innovations in the implementation of role-play in EFL classes.

**VITA AUCTORIS**

Yi Lin was born in 1979 and had a happy and fulfilling childhood growing up in a middle class family in Nanjing, Jiangsu, China. She obtained her Honors Bachelor of Arts in EFL teaching (1999) in Nanjing Normal University, and a Master of Education in Curriculum Studies (2003) from the University of Western Ontario. Based on her previous academic and professional experience of EFL education, she has a passionate interest in further exploring the use of role-play and other dramatic activities in authentic classroom contexts, especially in non-English speaking countries. Her research on Chinese EFL teacher's role-play implementation in authentic classrooms demonstrated the evidences of her academic writing, critical thinking and research competence, leading to the successful completion of the doctoral program. Such a dissertation not only serves as a milestone which announces the successful completion of her doctoral study, but also marks the beginning of her professional career in study EFL education from a culturally-responsive (cross cultural and cross linguistic) perspective.