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# Chapter 7

## TPR, Drama and Role Play

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# Introduction

Children's faces looking up,  
Holding wonder like a cup.

-Robert Clausen

Language classrooms are often said to provide little opportunity for meaningful use of language and genuine communication. Total Physical Response (TPR), drama and role play can provide students with rich authentic communication on the one hand and enable them to enjoy a relaxed classroom atmosphere on the other. For more information on TPR, see Chapter 3: Review of Current Methods for Teaching Young Learners. McCaslin (1987) draws our attention to the fact that drama is the first art form we experience as young children. From early childhood we learn by imitating the words and actions of others. It is natural, fun and effective for children to learn while playing.

Role play and drama are different from reading a dialogue aloud, though they can be based on a dialogue or a story. In a role play or dramatic play students pretend to be different people, for example, they can take roles as a farmer, a nurse, a carpenter, a rat, a cat, a shopkeeper or they can pretend to be characters in a Goha story. (All these roles are related to stories and activities in the Hello! series)

## What is Special about TPR, Drama and Role Play in Language Teaching?

- They provide a medium through which children can express their ideas and feelings without inhibitions.
- They train the imagination, e.g., when students identify with other persons.
- Drama and role play in language classes heighten self-esteem, motivation, and increase children's capacity for empathy (Chang, 1990).

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- These activities give students insight into the culture of the native language. For example, students who practice buying food at the market or who act out meal times in America and mealtimes in Egypt are learning about culture.
  - They provide meaningful language practice, especially when students adapt the dialogues they studied to their own situations and purposes.
  - The activities provide ways for young learners to be physically and mentally active while learning language, which fits well with the natural development of young learners.
  - Drama and role play teach students to be sensitive readers, able to feel and judge for themselves.
  - They change the class from teacher-centered to student-centered.
  - They help to establish good rapport between students and teachers.

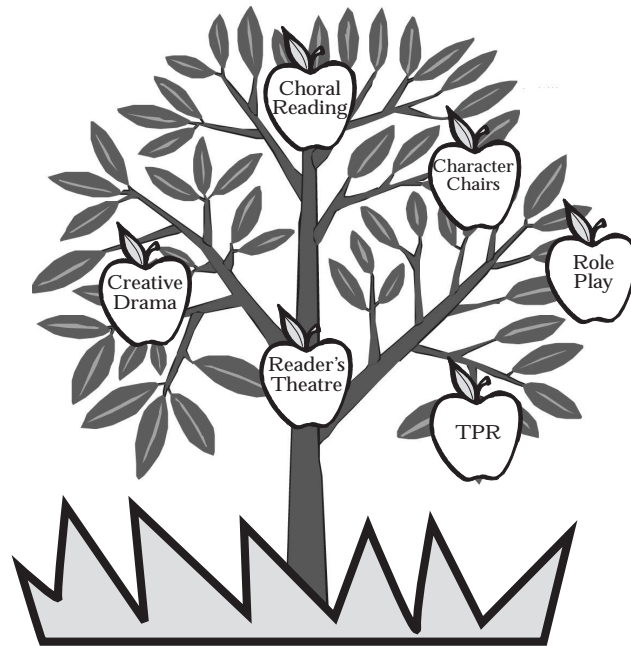
## Drama and Role Play Activities

Dramatic activities include such activities as games, songs, telling stories, and acting out roles in a play. (McCaslin 1987). McCloskey (2001) also mentions pantomime, puppetry, creative dramatics, choral speaking/singing, character chairs, TPR, Readers' Theatre, scenes from dramatic works, and original plays written and performed by children. In the next section of this paper, we will deal with drama activities that are suitable for our classrooms in Egypt and we will try to apply them to Hello! 1 and 2. But first, let us address procedures for these activities.

### Procedures for Drama and Role Play Activities

Following are basic procedures for most drama and role play activities.

1. Teach the language children will need for the activity.
2. Give instructions for the activity.
3. Demonstrate the activity, using student volunteers to help if needed.
4. Have students model the activity before the class.
5. Have students do the activity in small groups. Observe them carefully and note errors and language needed.
6. Discuss the activity – What did the children learn? What was the meaning/moral of the story? What language did they learn? What new language do they need to learn?



Activities on the Drama Tree

## Total Physical Response (TPR)

In the 1960's, James Asher developed a language teaching method he named Total Physical Response (TPR). TPR helps students learn a new language as they perform physical actions in response to commands. Asher's lessons, modeled after children's first language acquisition experiences, have been adapted for use with all ages.

### TPR Essentials

- Make it fun.
- Use props (e.g., hats, objects, articles of clothing) to suggest a character and silly situations.
- Vary commands, but provide much repetition of terms.
- Follow the basic steps, adapting for your students' ages and language levels.

### Steps in a TPR Lesson

1. Preparation. Prepare a script in command form, focused on your targeted language. Assemble props for the lesson.
2. Demonstrate. With a few students, demonstrate the script and situation.
3. Whole group demonstration. The whole group repeats demonstration with variations.
4. Written copy. Provide and study text with students who are ready.

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5. Oral repetition and questions. Students repeat series, ask and answer questions.
  6. Student demonstration. Students demonstrate script and actions for the class. Teacher assesses.
  7. Pair practice. Students reinforce learning by practicing in pairs.

### Sample TPR Script

#### WATCHING TV

(a sample TPR script)

1. It's time to watch your favorite show. Turn on the TV. This is the wrong show. You hate this show. Make a terrible face.
2. Change the channel.
3. This show is great! Smile! Sit down in your favorite chair.
4. This part is very funny. Laugh.
5. Now there's a commercial. Get up and get a snack and a drink.
6. Sit down again.
7. The ending is very sad. Cry.
8. The show is over. Turn off the TV.
9. Go to bed.

### Role Play

Shakespeare once said, “All the world is a stage.” He meant that we live our lives playing different roles according to the situations in which we find ourselves. We often need different language for each of these roles. Savignon (1983) agrees with Shakespeare’s point of view and she considers learning a foreign language as giving learners different roles in different situations in order to help them use language appropriately and meaningfully. To succeed in helping students practice language and build proficiency, Omaggio (1986) suggests that materials should be at an appropriate level of difficulty for the students. She also advises the teacher to design role-play cards with parts of the dialogues covered in class written on them. The student(s) can replay these dialogues while playing their roles.

Others suggest using the “read and look up” technique in role-play (Chang 1990). This technique combines silent reading and speaking. First ask the students to look briefly at a sentence or phrase and read it silently. Then have the students cover up the phrase, look up, and tell you what they have read. This requires students to do more than just memorize the reading – they must read the sentence/phrase, understand the meaning, and rephrase it in their own (English) words.

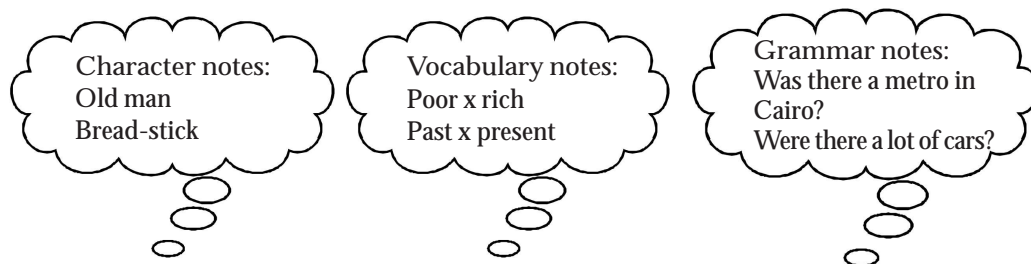
Many lessons in Hello! 1 and 2 lend themselves easily to role playing. Examples are:

In the “Shopping for Mother” dialogue ( Hello! 1 Unit 22, D, p. 26), after you have read and studied the dialogue, children can play the roles of the mother, Heba’s role and the shopkeeper . They can try to use their own words for the shopping role-play, even coming up with ideas of what to buy.

In “Ali and Heba in Giza” (Hello! 1, Unit 23, Ex B, p. 30), students can act out the roles of Ali, Heba and the tourists. The class can interview the actors later on and ask them simple questions about what they saw, how they felt, what they did, etc.

- Make the “Diary” activity (Hello! 1, Unit 18, Ex E, p. 15) into a role play.
- First demonstrate the activity with a student volunteer.
- Act out the activities in your day – getting up, eating, going to school, etc.
- Have your partner ask you questions about what you are doing: Are you getting up now? Are you going home now? Are you sleepy?
- Then have students work in pairs – Student A and Student B. First have Student A act out the day and Student B ask questions. Then reverse roles.
- At the end of the activity, ask a few students to introduce themselves to the class, and let other students ask them questions about their daily routines.

Note: Robinson (1981) suggests that teacher, class and role-players can build-up the outline of the character and the situation together. Writing notes on the blackboard helps the teacher to elicit ideas from the pupils and to emphasize the linguistic items intended to be taught. Below are samples of notes by teacher and students.



## Choral Speaking and Singing

Mistakes are a necessary part of learning, but can be a cause of embarrassment for young learners. Songs, action games and rhymes can provide students the safety of speaking in groups, where one’s mistakes go unnoticed. For example, the class can chant “This is the Way” (Hello! 1. Unit 21, Ex. D) in chorus as they demonstrate the actions mentioned in the text.

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This is the way we brush our teeth,  
Brush our teeth  
Brush our teeth  
This is the way we brush our teeth  
Before we go to bed. (Dallas 1994, p. 24)

“School is Over,” the song at the end of Hello! 1 (Unit 25 Ex. C), can also be an action chant. In this song (or chant), you might follow along with the pictures in the text and have girls chant the first stanza, boys chant the second and all chant the third. Children can recite the song by heart, read from their books, or read together from the blackboard. Add actions as the children become comfortable with the language.

The activities in Hello! 1 Unit 7, A & C, are TPR-like action games, which your learners will enjoy. Children like the physical response with the spoken word and they learn the language quickly, too. In the game on page 19, students must follow the instruction if it is preceded by “the teacher says,” but they must not follow the instruction if it is not preceded by “the teacher says.” Students who do not comply have to sit down. (Some teachers play the game with two groups, and when children miss, they simply move to the other group. This way, everyone is always active.)

## Miming

Miming is acting out meanings using gestures and props but no words. You can use miming to develop students’ vocabulary and fluency. You can prepare some word cards with different activities, e.g. sweeping the floor, singing, washing the dishes, driving a bicycle, driving a car, clapping, drinking. (This vocabulary comes from Hello! 1 Unit 8, Ex. A., p. 21.) Start by revising and reading the word cards with the whole class. Then mime an action and ask students to describe what you are doing using sentences like, You are clapping. You can extend this activity by showing students cards from your collection, asking them to perform, and having the class name the action or say a sentence about what they are doing using. “She is...” or “He is....”

## Character Chairs

In this activity, students pretend to be a character from a story. After students study a story, use this activity for practice.

1. Put chairs at the front of the class. Label each chair with a character in your story. For example, for the Goha story in Hello! 2, Unit 23, Ex. C, use four chairs and label the chairs Goha, Goha’s neighbors, the horse and Goha’s wife.

2. Have each of the four students sit on one of the chairs. .
3. Write the question words, who, what, when, where, why, and how, and the verbs used in the story on the board. Model asking the characters questions:
  - Where were you riding?
  - When did the horse jump?
  - Why did you jump?
  - Who told you Goha is dead?
  - What did you tell the neighbors? How did you get home?
  - Where is the horse?
4. Have the students on the chairs answer questions the way the characters would.
5. After the rest of the class understands the task, divide them into groups of about four and give them time to work in small groups to think up and write down their own questions for the characters.
6. Then the students in groups ask the questions they have prepared to the students on the chairs. The students in the character chairs answer “in character” (the way the characters would answer).

## Creative Drama

Through dramatization of folklore and stories, you can bring literature into the classroom. You and your pupils can narrate and act out a story, while others observe and interview you later. For example, after you teach “A Cat and Mouse Story.” (Hello! 2, Unit 19), you and the children can create a play. Ask students to look at the pictures of the story in turn. Ask questions like “Do the mice have a meeting? Why?” “Does the big rat want to give money to the cat? Why?” “Is it a good idea? Why?”

1. Continue like this with the rest of the pictures and teach the story.
2. Encourage students to read the story aloud and act out the roles – with feeling.
3. Give them roles to memorize for the next day.
4. Encourage everyone to copy his/her role and bring it with him/her to class.
5. The following day, have students rehearse the story in small groups. You might use simple costumes such as paper mouse, ears, to add more fun.
6. Then each group can act out the story for the class.
7. After the performances, discuss the solutions the mice found to their problem and why they didn’t work. Have your pupils suggest other solutions.

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## Readers' Theatre

Goodman and Tenney (1979) recommend Readers' Theatre as an excellent means of acquiring a second language. The name "Readers' Theatre" comes from the fact that the actors hold their texts and read from them with expression and feeling. The actors can sit on chairs in front of the audience. The narrator introduces the characters, and comments on actions, feelings etc. and tries to explain things and help the audience understand the story.

Often teachers develop a script for the Readers' Theatre from a story or excerpt from the textbook, converting as much of the narrative to dialogue as possible. Readers' Theatre texts are also available commercially.

Readers' Theatre provides learners with much helpful repetition as children are rehearsing a presentation. If texts are available, encourage the whole class to follow along, reading silently. Goodman and Tenney (1979) feel that putting on a play can be a culminating activity for almost any unit of study.

### Sample Steps in a Readers' Theatre Lesson

- Choose a story or a unit that lends itself easily to this activity, e.g. the story "Goha and the Thieves", (Hello! 2 Unit 15).
- One student takes the role of the narrator, three students act as thieves and one takes the role of Goha. You can start by teaching the command forms in the story, e.g.,
  - Stop Goha!
  - Give us your money.
  - Give us your money now.
  - Don't beat me.
- The class can repeat these commands while acting them out. You can then revise the comparative and superlative degrees of the adjectives.
  - I'm stronger than....
  - I'm the strongest.
  - You're the weakest.
- Revise other language that students will need, e.g. You aren't as strong as I am.
- The following day, when the children are well prepared, give them a chance to act out the roles, telling the story.
- If students need them, provide role cards of their parts to read from.
- When students begin acting, you may need to help clarify who speaks which lines.

With Readers' Theatre, students will acquire the language structures through repetition. The activity will also improve students' reading ability in an interesting, enjoyable way.

## Conclusion

The purpose of learning a language is to communicate. Communication is not just passively acquiring letters, words, and grammatical structures, but also producing language that can be used in real-life situations.

All foreign language teachers know that pupils are not motivated by being stuck in their chairs repeating what is said to them. Teachers of young learners can and should adopt new insights into their classrooms and change their methods to suit the learning styles of their pupils. In this chapter, I tried to provide primary teachers with background about teaching TPR, drama and role play, procedures for using such activities, and a number of suggested activities that can be used with the national curriculum in Egypt. My goal is to empower teachers with a picture of how to carry out these activities in ways that achieve their goals. I also shared experiences of teachers who have used these activities in their classrooms. Although the teachers faced some challenges while implementing these activities, they finally succeeded and established a relaxed and pleasant learning atmosphere. Moreover, children's participation increased in a remarkable way. I believe that it is time for teachers to start breaking new ground in their classrooms.

### voices from the field

Following are some voices from classrooms that have used these drama activities. Some are teachers' voices and some are students' together with my own comments on these

Ms. Dalia, a primary teacher, says: "Sometimes I distribute the roles among more vocal students as it guarantees that the activity will go as I planned."

We might suggest to Ms. Dalia that she try to give all of her students turns at playing roles. In role play and drama activities, we should give equal chances to all students to participate. It is our job as teachers to help shy students participate and this will be easy if we put them to work in groups and have them practice together.

Ms. Walaa, another primary school teacher has another solution for the above problem. She suggests that the teacher stand beside shy students while acting, to whisper the sentences in their ears. This way weak students will have a sense of achievement and security. She states: "A role play activity requires considerable time. Students can be trained from the very beginning of the year. Then, the activity can be repeated regularly."

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Nasr Mohamed, a student in the 5<sup>th</sup> year primary at El-Saleh school says:  
“I wish that the English class would last for the whole day.”

Israa Essam, another student in the same school, says: “When Ms. Walaa told us to act as if we were in a real shop selling clothes, I was enthusiastic. Before doing this I found it difficult to concentrate and do my homework. Now, English homework is the first thing I do the moment I go home,” (translated by the writer of the chapter).

## Key Terminology

### Drama

A performance in which actors play the roles of characters in a story.

### Role Play

An activity in which students act out situations taking the roles of others.

### Total Physical Response (TPR)

A language teaching activity in which learners acquire language by acting out a series of commands.

### Script

The written dialogue for a dramatic activity.

### Choral Speaking or Singing

Learners all read or recite a text at the same time. Usually the text is one with rhyme and rhythm.

### Miming

Acting out events, activities, or other meanings using gestures and props, but no words.

### Character Chairs

An activity in which children sit in chairs labeled with the names of characters in a story they have studied. The children in the “character chairs” answer questions from the rest of the class, trying to answer as the character would.

### Creative Drama

Drama activities in which children develop original scripts or improvise without scripts.

### Readers' Theatre

A drama/reading activity using texts with a large amount of dialogue. A narrator reads the narration part of the text and children read (dramatically) the parts of the characters in the dialogues.

### Prop

An object that an actor uses in a dramatic activity.

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## Understanding Check

1. How many students are actively involved in a role play or a drama activity? What will the others be doing? How can you involve more students in these activities?
  2. What purposes can drama and role play serve in a language classroom?
  3. When we talk about drama in children's classes, what activities can we include?
  4. Can miming, TPR, readers' theater and role play be practiced from the very beginning in our classes?
  5. Review the language objectives for the next unit you will teach in Hello! How can you use a drama and role play activity to help your pupils achieve those goals?
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## Resources

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## Summary Handout for Chapter 7: TPR, Drama and Role Play

Why are TPR, Drama and Role Play activities useful in language classrooms?

These activities

- help children express their ideas and feelings and develop imagination
- improve self-esteem, motivation, and children's capacity for empathy
- give students insight into the culture(s) of the native language
- provide meaningful language practice adapted to the learners' own purposes
- provide ways for young learners to be physically and mentally active while learning language which fits well with the natural development of young learners
- teach students to be sensitive readers, able to feel and judge for themselves
- change the class from teacher-centered to student centered
- help to establish good rapport between students and teachers

What are the basic procedures for most TPR, Drama and Role Play activities?

1. Teach the language children will need for the activity.
2. Give instructions for the activity.
3. Demonstrate the activity, using student volunteers to help if needed.
4. Have students model the activity before the class.
5. Have students do the activity in small groups. Observe them carefully and note errors and language needed.
6. Discuss the activity.

What are useful activities to use in Egyptian Classrooms?

Role-play	Total Physical Response
Miming	Choral speaking/singing
Creative drama	Character chairs
Readers' Theatre	