

ARTS PEDAGOGIES

TEACHER-IN-ROLE

A role injected into a drama engages students emotionally and intellectually instantaneously.



One way to think of a simple drama is to empower students to take on the role of a researcher or journalist asking the teacher (who is now in a role, hence “teacher-in-role”) questions that can help them understand an issue. For example, the teacher can become a survivor of the Holocaust (Social Studies/ History), a witness of a road accident (Character Education), or a famous singer (Music Education), or someone who has an opinion on a topic of interest. Students, as journalists, can then compare their worldview with the attitudes and actions shown by the character (teacher-in-role), especially in relation to an event.

This allows students (in role) to challenge the teacher (in role), negotiate outcomes, or find meaningful solutions together. Because there is an

“I am extremely delighted to share this piece of news with you. The people of Ireland have voted and repealed the tough abortion laws. Statistics show 67% of the people have voted in favour of reform. Joining us here is the former Master of the National Maternity Hospital, Dr Peter...”

emotional investment in the story (based on the character played by the teacher), learning becomes contextualised. Meanings are then co-constructed and social-emotional competencies – such as empathy, perspective-taking, conflict management, decision-making – are tested and imbibed experientially.

LESSON EXEMPLAR

This lesson was developed with a team of teachers from a primary school in Singapore, wanting to discuss the significance of the National Day song to their pupils - as part of Project Work.

The lesson plan would involve students listening to the 2018 National Day Theme Song “We Are Singapore”, which is a revival and remix of the 1987 classic, generating emotional responses to the song, followed by questions they are interested in finding out.

Because it is part of project work, the questions should be investigative. Pupils can be grouped according to research interests: (a) the original song and its adaptation; (b) the places featured in the video; (c) the costumes and uniforms worn by the people - and finally making a hypothetical connection to the larger question of national identity:

What does it mean to be a Singaporean?

**“This is my country.
This is my flag.
This is my future.
This is my life.”**

- Hugh Harrison, composer of ‘We Are Singapore’ (1987)

Having come up with initial relationships and correlations (e.g. military and school uniforms provide a sense of unity; multiracial representations foster a sense of community and family), pupils then get to interview an adult in the room, i.e. the teacher. In this case, Ms Preeya can play herself, with certain values, attitudes, and perspectives to life as a Singaporean. Pupils, in their role as journalists, can also probe deeper what Ms Preeya feels about the song. A foreign teacher who has no connections with Singapore’s political history can say so, which then allows pupils to find out if other countries also celebrate national days, and what can foster feelings of national pride. Pupils can further ask their parents what they associate as Singaporeanness. From the data, they can then make conclusions about the Singapore identity.



The teacher-in-role encounter is fairly **improvisational**, so teachers do not need to feel compelled to memorise a script. Rather, adopting a **status** and **attitude** can push the drama forward, and hence deepens learning ‘in the moment’.

High-status roles: politician, principal, parent, CEO.

Low-status roles: immigrant, domestic helper, tourist, beggar, injured person.

Attitudes: arrogance, domineering, selfish, sympathetic, caring, self-loathing, apathetic.