Role Play: The Relationship between Self-concept and Learner Participation in an Experiential Learning Process

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Abstract: *This study was carried out to find out how far students' self-concept affect their participation in the experiential learning process of role play and the extent of improvement in their self-concept as a result of participation in the role play activities. The study was guided by the four steps in Kirk's (1987) Cycle of Experiential Learning: Do, Review, Learn, Apply. Although an individual's general self-concept is determined by the interplay of various facets, only three facets of self-concept were explored, which are, Academic Self-Concept, Emotional Self-Concept and Social Self-Concept. The research design adopted was that of a qualitative case study. Five participants from the Pre-Commerce course of UiTM Arau Campus were selected based on homogenous characteristics. Fourteen hours of role plays were conducted and data were gathered through classroom observations, journal entries and interviews with the students and their lecturer, who was the key informant. Several pertinent themes emerged from the data. It was found that there is a positive relationship between self-concept and students' participation in role play. This could be seen from several indicators such as prolonged nervousness, language proficiency, peer influence, the role of lecturer, the impact of dominators, task suitability as well as learners' moods. It was also found that the participants experienced a certain degree of improvement in their self-concept, as reflected by reduced anxiety, an awareness of their strengths, weaknesses and gaining of insights into the situations, improvement in language proficiency, positive relationship among peers and adaptability to the tasks. It can be concluded that role play is a profitable learning activity and is useful towards improving students' self-concept.*

INTRODUCTION

Role play comes under the broad category of enactment of self or of others in a prepared or impromptu situation, which is structured or exploratory in approach. It is classified under the wide set of educational techniques, which are known as simulation and gaming (Bambrough, 1994; Van Ments, 1990). Ladousse (1987) defines 'play' as having connotations of safe environment where students are as inventive or playful as possible. Being a learning process in which play and fun are incorporated, role play is therefore, a popular learning tool employed widely in classrooms since the complexity of a situation can be geared to suit a learner's proficiency level.

Role play is seen as an experiential learning process (Bambrough, 1994; Joyce , Weil & Showers, 1992; Van Ments, 1990; Kolb, 1984; Wolsk, 1975) carried out in pairs or groups. Learners acquire the language by experiencing the process in a naturalistic setting as the focus is on the process (i.e. negotiating meaning) rather than grammatical structures (Kirk, 1987). When a student is engaged in role play, he / she feels protected and relaxed in this open-ended activity. He / she is able to stretch the potential of the role and explore the use of speech and style as a result of the freedom from criticisms as well as the restraints of his / her own personality. This enables exploration of latent strengths, weaknesses and potential. Young (1977) stresses that role play is not a mere tool but the underlying crux is the belief that one can increase knowledge of self and of others. The chief value of role play is that it provides opportunity for small group interaction and the student can attempt to redeem his / her shortcomings, hence improved self-concept.

Statement of the Problem

In Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), role play is a favoured activity, from foundation to advance courses. However, it is regularly treated as a teacher-fronted practice. Dennison and Kirk (1990) contend that the teacher should only influence the process by harnessing and refining the learning skills that have already been acquired. Sometimes, teachers tend to interfere with students' efforts to generate the right discourse or try to correct their pronunciation and enunciation, which jeopardizes the students' confidence and affect participation. Jones (1987) refers to it as:

> Learning ... and the learning will be placed in jeopardy by interference. The learning is not just the learning of facts; it is behavioural and concerns power and responsibility and should not be diminished. (p.68)

In pedagogic situations, the teacher plays a significant role while in andragogy, his / her role is oblique. Students who are self-reliant can attain

maturity by identifying and fulfilling their own needs. Teachers, hence, can help students realise how successful completion of tasks can improve their sense of personal power. The small part that each learner assumes in the experiential learning process can help him/her to develop self-regulatory and self-monitoring techniques, with teacher's encouragement and positive feedback. Sometimes, learners present the situations to the whole class and this evokes fear, anxiety and lack of participation. High classroom apprehension correlates with low self-esteem (Freimuth, 1982). Although of homogeneous cultural practices and beliefs, different socio economic backgrounds may cause self-consciousness in the students and imbue them with a feeling of inadequacy, inferiority or perennial dejection. A host of factors such as prior / childhood experiences, lack of positive reinforcement, love and support from significant others (parents, teachers and friends) may be other detriments.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do students' self-concepts affect their level of participation in role play situations?
2. Do students' self-concepts improve as a result of their participation in the experiential learning process of role play?

Scope of the Study

The study aimed to establish a cause and effect relationship between students' self-concept and their participation in role plays and to find out to what extent self-concept influences their participation in the experiential learning process. Self-concept is a broad multi-dimensional construct but in this study, it relates to how the students perceive themselves, their opinions of themselves with regard to their language proficiency, how they would like to be seen by others (i.e. their peers) and what they think their peers think of them. This definition covers three facets, which were the focus of the study, i.e. Verbal / Academic Self-Concept, Social Self-Concept, and Emotional Self-Concept. Verbal / Academic Self-Concept refers to the students' perceptions of their competence in the English Language and their achievements in the language. Emotional Self-Concept is defined as the emotional states of the mind before, during and after the role plays, which are due to external variables like anxiety, depression and other emotional disturbances. Social Self-Concept of the students in this study is the relationship between the participants and their peers (only) and the extent of comfort felt with one another.

Role play is viewed as student-centred learning, guided by Kirk's (1987) Experiential Learning Cycle of four stages: *Do, Review, Learn* and

Apply. Firstly, the teacher organises the experience for the students – they *Do*. Time is allocated for analysis and discussion – they *Review*. The teacher then introduces some theory, suggests a generalisation and highlights the values from the lesson. At this stage, the students *Learn*. Ideas or recommendations about how the learning might be tried or tested are considered - they *Apply*. The steps of the cycle can often overlap and are not dichotomous. The students are not expected to go at the same rate around this identical cycle because success will be at different speeds and at different times, for different learners. Students who are in charge of their varying learning capabilities will discover autonomy. This experiential process is observed by Van Ments (1990) as:

> Experience is not what happens to you, it is what you do
> with what happens to you. (p.59)

Fig. 1.
*The Learning Cycle of Experiential Learning (Kirk, 1987)*
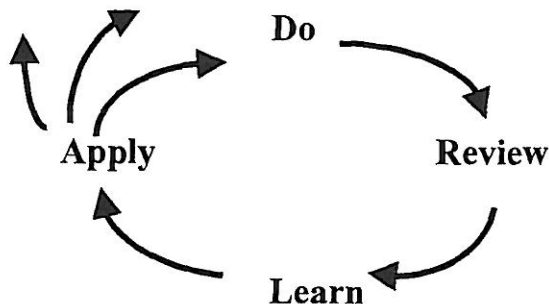
METHODOLOGY

The data were collected from a case study of five students. The researcher was a non-participant observer. Fourteen (14) hours of observation was conducted on the role play activities conducted in the class. The students and their English lecturer (the key informant) were required to make journal entries, after each lesson. These were unstructured and open-ended and they were encouraged to write on any aspect of the role plays. Two rounds of interviews were carried out with the participants. Students were interviewed as a group after eight hours of observation and individually at the end of the study. The key informant was referred to and conferred with from time to time for clarifications and to maintain the validity of the data.

Fig. 2.

Conceptual Framework for The Study
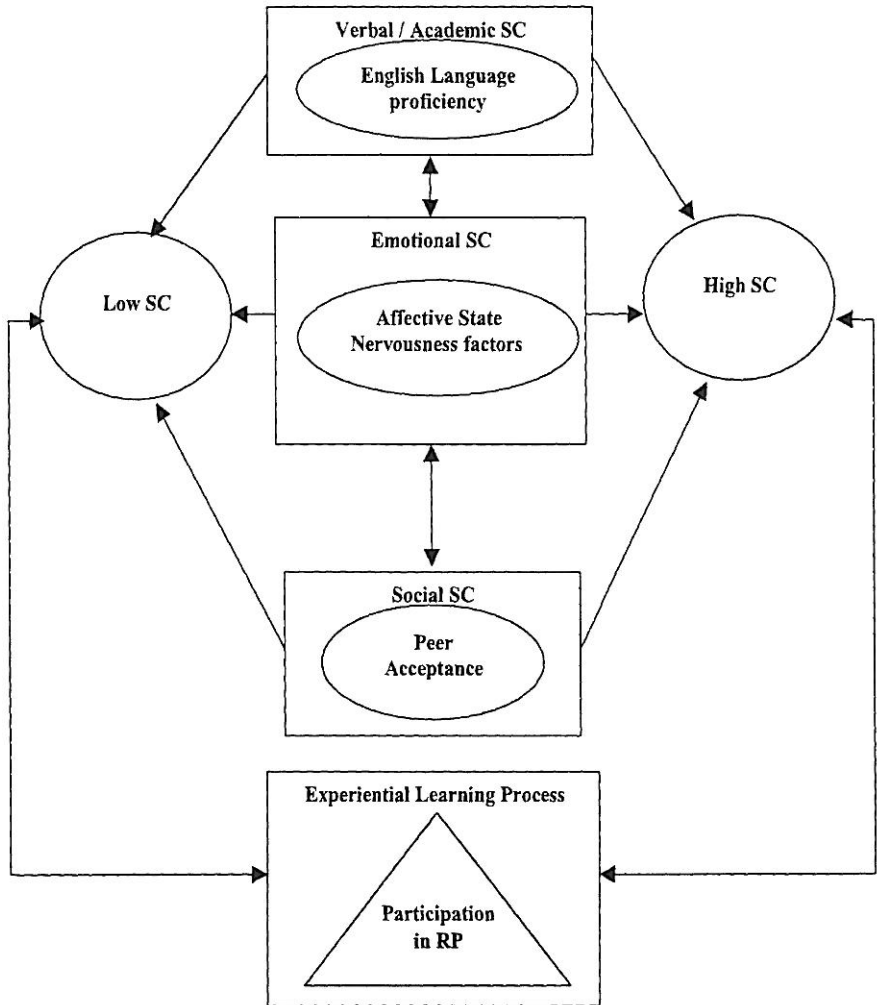
Legend: SC – Self-Concept
RP – Role Play

The sample comprised five female students from the Pre-Commerce Course at UiTM Arau Campus, Malaysia. The sampling was purposive (Borg and Gall, 1989) or non-probability sampling (Merriam, 1998). They were homogeneous in race, religion, gender, age, *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) English results, socio cultural influences and social background. The home environment too did not have any direct influence since they were staying in hostels (on campus), without any prior experience of hostel life.

Analysis of Data

The data were analysed from the journal entries of the five participants as well as that of the key informant, interviews with the students and the key informant and the researcher's observations. Each role play was audio taped and transcribed. The data were classified into different facets of self-concept and the students' participation was analysed to find out if there was any change in their level of self-concept. Several themes or phenomena which emerged from the data were classified into factors which might be related to the self-concept of the participants as a result of their participation in the experiential learning process of role play.

FINDINGS

The classification of the data showed the following phenomena, which are factors that are related to the self-concept of students and their participation in role play.

1) Emotional Self-Concept (Nervousness Factor) that Affects Student Participation in Role Play

As some degree of nervousness is normal during a presentation, it is not necessarily an indicator of self-esteem. The degree may vary from person to person. However, self-concept is detected if the feeling persists and affects learners' behaviours.

Voice

Persistent nervousness was observed through indicators like muffled and blurred voice. The affected participant muttered inaudible texts, remained reluctant and non assertive; an 'outsider' and on-looker during discussions and presentations.

Posture and Other Nonverbal Signs

Some participants performed their role plays with their backs perennially towards the audience and in ways they would not be conspicuous. Some even took several self-help measures. For example, one participant conceded (during the interview) that she deliberately "blinded" herself during presentations by removing her glasses as a way to redeem herself of overwhelming nervousness.

Presence of Audience

The feelings of nervousness and shyness were compounded by the fact that the participants were required to present every role play in front of the class.

The watchful eyes of peers made some of them self-conscious and unable to perform confidently especially in the initial stages. This is supported with the excerpts:

> "I did not like, when the lecturer want me to speak in front of my friend"

> "So, I'm very frighten and shy because all of my friends are looking at me."

For one participant, feelings like "boring" and "fed up", leading to the spiral of negative learning (Thatcher, 1990) were experienced. She conceded that she did not know what to do during the role plays because she was not sure of the lecturer's expectations of her. It was observed that she hardly contributed during discussions and frequently excused herself abruptly to go to toilet.

2) Verbal / Academic Self-Concept (Language Proficiency) as a Barrier to Participation in Role Play Activities

Some participants felt that their participation was hampered by their limited command of the language. Journal entries as well as class debriefings informed that proficiency such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation were nagging problems.

Use of Dictionary

Some participants relied on a dictionary (*Kamus Dwibahasa*) as a self-help measure in writing and discussions. They were actively engaged in the tasks as compared to the others who remained 'static' in their predicaments, without any attempt of self-help. Hence, two sets of attitudes surfaced, with regard to low proficiency.

Use of L1

The students also resorted to their L1 (the Malay Language) during discussions and when finding expressions and terms in English. This was allowed by the lecturer to meet specific pedagogical goals (to encourage participation). On the language use continuum, the ongoing development and acknowledgement of students' L1 in an L2 classroom, can enhance L2 acquisition (Tedick and Walker, 1995). This leads to Additive Bilingualism (the enhancement of L2 proficiency, without the weakening of L1) and provides them with confidence to use the language, thus enhancing their

Academic / Verbal Self-Concept. The use of L1 resources with low-level learners can also develop critical self-awareness, which stimulates learning (Nunan, 1988).

Writing of Dialogues

The students were busily engaged in writing whenever they carried out discussions. This 'changing of the original task' was 'condoned' as they needed notes as a crutch during presentations. However, over time, the lecturer reminded the students to reduce dependence on writing and encouraged spontaneity among them. Consequently, more spontaneous presentations were made and they abandoned the 'crutch'. The learners could take risks, hence, allayed their fears of making mistakes. Dependence on notes and writing of scripts can be attributed to the fact that this is a class of generally low ability learners, who gained admission because they did not obtain a Credit in English Language at SPM or did not fulfill other entry requirements. It can be reasoned that total spontaneity in role play is a far fetched goal for them. Another variable may be their learning styles. Visual learners, who prefer to learn from something that they can see could have derived visual stimulus from their scripts, while the auditory ones preferred engaging themselves in spontaneous oral discussions and verbal exchanges.

3) Peer Influence as a Determinant of Social Self-Concept

Peers are indicators of Social Self-Concept via reactions of acceptance, lending of confidence, support and cooperation. Working with peers in a non-threatening setting would alleviate the anxiety one otherwise experiences within oneself (Di Pietro, 1987) and serves as a precedence to self-directedness and enhanced self-concept (Gaies, 1985).

Peer Support and Cooperation

The participants felt that the reactions and cooperation of peers were important factors in enhancing their participation and optimising their potential, as expressed in the following:

> "I feel embarrassed because I can not speak very well.
> But my friends in my group help me to use English very
> well."

The group members helped one another by encouraging expressions of thoughts and by offering dictionaries. They became less conscious of their mistakes and of their limited proficiency, were assured and exhibited positive participation.

However, the vocal and assertive learners were unaffected by the seeming shyness of their counterparts due to their innate personality. Peer support and encouragement, though the 'ale' for shy, introvert and weak learners have little bearing on the assertive and extrovert ones who can tap on their personal strengths and resources. This was done with dictionaries, actions, and the ability to proceed when others reached a dead end.

Peer Familiarity

All the participants confirmed that they preferred working with friends and peers, whom they were comfortable with. They engaged themselves in the task and enjoyed the role plays when they worked with their 'desired pals' due to the affinity that they experienced. Hurt, Scott and McCroskey (1978) adduce that affinity is often the desired outcome of communication between people, as there is an inner need among students to foster warm relationships. Expressions like the ones below were obtained:

> "I feel comfortable in everything ... The most role play
> which I like is this day because I do not have tension with
> my other friends."

In the events where they were assigned to groups by the lecturer, they did not enjoy the lessons, especially when they were unfamiliar with their peers. It could be speculated that they probably felt isolated, although an initial setback, can be overcome and learners can adapt themselves with the myriad characters and make the best of the learning process. Familiarity evokes a sense of belonging and ownership, thus yielding positive responses. The more assertive and confident learners expressed feelings of comfort throughout the study, as it was "common talking with the girls in any discussion or situations." They remained optimistic, took control of the discussions as well as cued the others. Thus, one's inherent personality is equally important in determining how one adapts oneself.

4) Role of the Lecturer in Ensuring a Positive Self-Concept

All the participants were satisfied with their lecturer, who, in their opinion is kind, understanding and approachable. They were able to express themselves without fear of making mistakes and were braver to request clarifications as they were non-intimidated. The amiable personality of the lecturer played a key role in instilling confidence and increasing motivation, hence a positive self-concept. Coopersmith and Feldman's (1974) suggestion of fostering a positive perception, indicating realistic avenues for success

and investing the learners with responsibility for their own development seems to be well-heeded to by the lecturer in this study. In order to make the experiential learning process an effective one, it has to be well-organized and made purposeful (Kirk, 1987), which was indeed practised by the lecturer. He explained every task and preceded it by providing examples. Teacher modeling is an important element in transmitting confidence and is stressed as one of the seven principles of learning in Instructional Theory into Practice (ITIP) / Hunteran Model, developed by Madeline Hunter in 1978. It was observed that there was general harmony and laughter throughout the lessons. This relaxed atmosphere ensured that the students were at ease during discussions. The lecturer also provided constant feedback and reinforcement, making rounds from group to group, ensuring the students knew what to do. He also made an effort to explain how to display confidence when speaking by providing positive reinforcement and constant 'serum' of encouragement. Hurt et al. (1978) suggest that the basic tenet upon which positive reinforcement operates is the idea that behaviours that are rewarded are learned, and behaviours that are not rewarded tend not to be learned or repeated.

5) Dominators who Affect the Self-Concept of their Interlocuters

Although the participants generally found that they could familiarise and adapt to different members, (at different speed and level), they found dominators extremely intolerable. Dominator(s) who sound authoritative and take command of the entire discussion seem to overlook the idea of cooperation and group work, whereby decisions are supposed to be made in the spirit of collaboration. The lecturer too observed this phenomenon and reminded the students to get 'a fair share of the pie' as the dominance of one person may evoke inhibition and indifference in the others. They tend to lose confidence and in turn lose interest in learning by disengaging themselves. The role plays unfolded the dominance of certain characters. Not only did one dominator cue and prompt the others, she also displayed how they should play their roles; a self-declared role-model. The other participants, whose opinions were rejected felt repressed. An analysis of the dominator's personality revealed that she is the youngest in a family of eleven (11) siblings. There is a possibility that her behaviour might be related to the fact that she is the youngest child (who is often noted for commanding attention).

6) Task Suitability as a Factor that Encourages Participation

The task factor of suitability and complexity was another concern, which explained the students' participation, interest and degree of enjoyment. When

the participants found it difficult to understand the situations, they did not enjoy the role plays, resulting in, absence of 'play', fun and inventiveness. This was admitted through their journal entries and interviews such as:

> "Today, I'm not nervous or shy because I am most confident. But, I'm so sad because I cannot do the best. I don't have a point to talk and I think this role is play so boring and so bad than my other role plays."

> *"Hari ini, saya tak* nervous, *tak malu, tetapi saya rasa* blank."

Situations that entailed acting were perceived non-enjoyable and difficult, as some learners did not have aptitude towards acting. For example:

> "I did not like the activities today, because I did not like acting; anyway this type of role play activities is not good for me and I can't act very well."

Lack of imagination can also be a hindrance if the learner has not had prior experience pertaining to the topic. One of the assigned situations was on family discussion with a travel agency operator about a dream holiday destination. It was observed that the group which chose Pulau Redang as their preferred destination, hardly made any progress in their discussion, for lack of ideas and facts about the island. However, some role plays were able to promote metacognition because by assuming a different role, the learners can consciously maintain the attributes and characteristics of that person as well as reduce ego-centred perceptions (Fogarty, 1995).

7) Learners' Moods and the Effect on Participation

Besides the factors discussed above, another matter of concern is the learners' moods, which have a strong bearing on their participation. The participants' suggested (during the interviews) that role plays should be conducted intermittently with other learning experiences. This, should not go unheeded; in fact it is reasonable to consider the learner's moods and time of the day when the lecturer decides to use role plays. Bad mood due to extraneous variables, boredom, fatigue, lack of sleep and time of the day can affect participation and students may not be at their best.

Research Question Two

The following discussion will address Research Question Two, which looks at self-concept as an outcome in the experiential learning process of role play.

1) Reduced Anxiety as an Indicator of Improvement in Self-Concept

This study reveals that all the participants felt a lower degree of nervousness and anxiety at the end of the study, as a result of the 'treatment' of role plays. At first, some participants were skeptical about performing their group situations. This feeling slowly subsided when they began to enjoy themselves. The increase in confidence (a measurement of improvement in self-concept) was also observable through the infusion of acting skills. The participants also admitted that they were willing to assume any roles assigned, including that of the opposite sex. This means that they were no longer conscious of themselves and were willing to 'let themselves go.' There was also a reduced dependence on prepared scripts and the students began taking risks by adopting spontaneity. They were actually positive about their hidden or latent potential. In the earlier role play lessons, the students were assigned the tasks in pairs. They were gradually divided into bigger groups and the complexity of the tasks was also increased. This, as noted by the lecturer was to enable the students to "move into a wider interaction situation." The loss of anxiety and nervousness could also be attributed to the audience's attention, which was divided among the participants as they were not the only focus of attention. Another way the participants rid themselves of self-consciousness was by providing a name for the roles that they partook and assuming the peculiar characteristics of the role. When a learner is able to internalise the character he / she portrays, he / she is able to gauge deeper into the personality being portrayed and gain metacognition. Kirk (1987) stresses that the main objective of experiential learning is to change some aspect(s) of behaviour, although the degree may vary among learners. The students whose voice was soft and muffled due to prolonged nervousness admitted to have experienced some form of improvement (although marginal). This change should be applauded as it took a lot of courage on their part to face the audience. The problem of 'low volume' had fossilised in the students. It would thus require an extended period of time to completely eradicate this barrier. The fact that they had started to see the 'ray of light' is a promise in itself that the learners had made a conscious effort to improve their weaknesses. In addition, it reflected a renewed self and a rejuvenated spirit.

2) Awareness as a Hallmark of Improvement in Self-Concept

The four-step process of experiential learning: *Do, Review, Learn, Apply* (Kirk, 1987) did enrich the students' experiences as there was a lot they could learn from one another. With reflection, came increased awareness and improvement in the three categories of self-concept outlined by Rosenberg (1979): How they felt about themselves (the extant self), how they showed themselves to others, (the presenting self) and how they would like to be seen (the desired self). They became more self-reliant and were in-charge of their learning, hence, autonomy in learning through self-aware-ness, self-reflection, self-evaluation and self-monitoring during and after the learning process. This is in line with the aspirations of the National Education Philosophy and the aims of the KBSM. The learners became aware that they needed to extend their learning beyond the classroom and that the aim of education was to provide points of take-off for lifelong learn-ing by using the resources available, including themselves (Van Ments, 1990, 1987). This profound awareness of knowing one's role as a nucleus in the macrocosm of things is evidence of improved self-concept. Hidden talents were also realised as the participants admitted that they had not been widely exposed to group work (particularly, role play) in the 11 years of their basic education. Although they were 'products' of KBSM, English lessons had been geared in preparation for major examinations: *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (PMR) and *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM). Group work was seldom done and all the participants said that this was probably the first time they experienced role plays. They were now aware that they were capable of handling public speaking experiences. The rote learning skills drilled in them over the many years had an overbearing effect, which pre-vented vocal reactions especially in the early stages. KBSM is noble and ideal in its objectives but its implementation clearly reflects its fallacy and defects.

Cultural awareness was also observed as some measure of thought was observed where non-related males and females did not shake hands when exchanging greetings (enacted by members of the same sex). Tedick and Walker (1995) suggest that cultural competence can be enhanced when students have the opportunity to develop critical understanding of oneself in relation to others and vice versa. The metaphor of picking a flower in the garden as used by the students to denote marriage proposal in the Malay culture was highlighted. When students' native culture is acknowledged, they can be guided to draw parallels with the target culture, thus creating a positive self-concept.

3) Improvement in Language Proficiency

Although language is a hindrance to effective participation, the activities of role play did witness some improvement in language proficiency such as grammar, phonology and semantics. Pronunciation of words such as 'basket' and 'excuse', were some aspects learnt through self-help measures, debriefing sessions and reinforcement by the lecturer. One participant disclosed that she could never pronounce the word 'excuse' correctly until the enactment of polite exchanges, which necessitated the repeated use of the word. Role play was also used as a launching pad to introduce various forms of syntax and semantics. It must be noted that language acquisition is a **process**, mastered over an extended period of time and many variables come into play such as learners' attitude, aptitude, and the social context. The English Language Curriculum Specifications for the Upper Secondary level (1992, p. 3-4) stipulates that:

> Language skills need to be built cumulatively and treated
> in a spiral manner so that repetition and constant use will
> maximise learning.

The underlying crux is the awareness that the students actually possessed the rudimentary language and communicative competence for social interaction.

4) Relationship among Peers which Improves Self-Concept

The participants were able to adapt themselves to their peers, understand one another and accept the peculiarities among them. This insight into multilateral interaction led to positive feelings, creating good vibes, increased motivation, affinity and fulfillment of their affective domains, hence an increase in Social Self-Concept. The educational objectives of Bloom's Taxonomy (1964) addressed four domains: psychomotor (physical activity), cognitive (knowledge), affective (feelings) and interpersonal (relationships with others) (cited in Kirk, 1987). Learners of Malay origin are generally inclined to do group work than individual assignments. Reid's (1987) study found that the Malay participants were relational learners and not analytical learners (learners who prefer to work individually). This preference could be traced back to their culture and tradition, where a strong sense of collaboration and cooperation exist in the Malay community through activities such as *gotong-royong,* cooking together during wedding feasts *(kenduri kahwin)* and the harvesting of crops. The kinship and duty-bound

role is strongly prevalent in the Malay community. The learners probably found role plays and the idea of working collaboratively with their peers as a 'mirror image' of their daily activities. The more passive and quiet participants revealed that they too did learn a lot from the company of their peers, although they were not actively engaged on the task. This recalls Di Pietro's (1987) contention that passive learners too, gain from the interaction. Besides, it could be their nonverbal learning style, hence their preference for writing to oral discussions. This phenomenon corroborates Cardoza's (1994) study on her multicultural ESL students which unraveled that students who do not actively engage in oral tasks learn as much as their more vocal and assertive counterparts.

5) Task Familiarity and Adaptability in Enhancing Self-Concept

Although some participants admitted that they were initially apprehensive, they eventually found role plays enjoyable. The laughter that constantly broke out during discussions, group presentations and feedback verified this. Students were also able to do actions after having understood the 'why' and 'how' of the tasks, thus eliminating initial ambiguities. Successful accomplishment of tasks leads to attainment value which fulfills the needs for power, attention, achievement and enhancement of self-concept (Armstrong & Savage, 1998). Role plays also befitted some of their learning styles of kinesthetic and tactile learning, corroborating the findings of Reid's (1987) study on her Malay subjects.

CONCLUSION

A Chinese proverb describes autonomy and self-reliance as: *Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.* This discovered autonomy thus leads to desired positive effects. An analysis of the data showed several phenomena which were indices of students' self-concept and how they affected participation. It can be concluded that there is a **positive** relationship between students' self-concept and their participation in experiential learning. The signs of low self-esteem were persistent nervousness, which led to the inability to speak up, body language such as posture and poses of not wanting to face the audience. Low English proficiency also resulted in low confidence. Other phenomena such as dominators also imposed constraints on their participation. Aptitude towards tasks and moods were other extraneous variables. It was found that all the participants **did** experience improvements, in forms of reduced nervousness, slight improvement in voice, comprehension and

acquisition of several language items and affinity. However, it must be noted that although some of these changes were minor, they promised a speck of further improvement. An interesting phenomenon which emerged was that improvement in self-concept was also experienced by learners who appeared shy and inactive during discussions. Students who were not vocal also confirmed to have gained from this process. Their non-vocal disposition may be attributed to other factors (which could be probed further) such as their nonverbal learning styles, upbringing and socio-cultural values. The study has found that the teacher is pivotal in ensuring learners' success. Although the teacher factor was not a preliminary concern, the data showed that it was an all-important variable. It is the teacher who sets the tempo and climate of the classroom and the learners will **not** experience any improvement in the absence of a conducive atmosphere. If the teacher requires presentations of situations, a non-threatening and anxiety-free atmosphere must be established. This study has also shown that group work, which is propagated in the KBSM, is a profitable pedagogical strategy to be employed. Malay learners are relational learners who like to work collaboratively to accomplish classroom tasks. However, all the participants said that they had never done group tasks extensively. Their revelations indicate that group work and KBSM have not fully been understood and explored.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Use of Role Play in Class
The participants' admissions of minimal exposure to role plays at school corroborates Al-Arishi's (1994) claims that role play is being pushed from the centre stage of language activities. Teachers may not be employing role plays and simulations because they may not be aware of the full potential of role plays in enhancing students' self-concept. Although role plays are not strongly advocated in textbooks (indicated by the current textbooks in use), teachers should capitalize on this rewarding learning resource as the benefits to be accrued are aplenty. Teachers need to model appropriate responses to instill confidence among students, besides making the teacher's expectations known to students. In conducting role plays, teachers need to subscribe to the principles of learning so that role plays are not used as mere ad-hoc fillers but utilised meaningfully and systematically to meet specific pedagogical goals.

Classroom Culture

There is also a dire need to reform our classroom culture if we intend to produce autonomous learners, capable of taking control of their learning. Group work needs to be widely used to explore collaborative working, hence, an urgency to break free from the humdrum of the widely practised lecture format. The rote learning skills imparted by the curriculum and the hidden curriculum are deeply rooted to fulfill the expectations of our fundamentally meritocratic society. Learners are measured by academic performance (cognitive ability) and other aspects such as affective states and psychomotor development are often overlooked. Thus, this spillover effect of passiveness and conformity lingers on and persists at the tertiary level. Classroom ethos needs to be revamped from the early years and students must be given the levity to verbalize their thoughts. Identifying learning preferences and utilizing relevant resources can promote learning, including perceiving the learner as a resource. Displaying respect for students and hearing their 'voices' is crucial in an effective teacher. This calls for a paradigm shift of the teacher's role, from a knowledge transmitter to a facilitator, as implored by Tedick and Walker (1994):

> It is the responsibility of individuals working as a collective network to confront their beliefs and to be willing to embrace the challenges and begin to work toward substantive, lasting change (p.309).

Western learners are more vocal and assertive than their Eastern counterparts due to their learning culture, which encourages expressions of thought. Teachers should be willing to accommodate academic challenges from students. One consideration is that students be allowed to choose their own partners and group members, particularly among the low proficiency and unassertive ones. A teacher's interference in assigning group members can prove detrimental. The study shows that the difference in proficiency does not pose a block but it is the promise of affinity, which is often sought. The teacher may intercept, if dominators exist by ensuring media. Several workshops can be conducted to enhance confidence and to improve presentation skills. By creating awareness of their varied potentials, students would experience improved self-concepts. Teachers can identify passive learners who suffer inferiority complex and withdrawal and give them refreshment courses regularly. It is essential that these learners be brought out of their 'cocoons' and made to realize that they possess a lot of

potential to be explored. Conflict resolution workshops, targeted to identify problem solvers are also useful. In any group, dominators are inevitable and mediators are necessary to 'bridge the gap of communication'. A win-win situation is created, besides improvement in public relations skills. These self-directed scholars will then be able to realize the aspirations of Vision 2020.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of the relationship between self-concept and the experiential learning process of role play can be corroborated with further research endeavours. Only three facets of self-concept were explored in this study. A more in-depth analysis can be made on all the facets in order to present the framework of self-concept in totality. The homogeneous sample can be substituted with heterogeneous sample of different socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds to draw parallels and contrasts among multi racial communication patterns. Further scientific enquiries can be embarked on to probe into gender apprehension and shyness of the opposite sex, since it was not a preliminary consideration in this study. This study can also be replicated with participants from different age groups (e.g. secondary school) to enquire if there is a difference in the communication patterns of second-ary and post-secondary school students, hence analysing the effects and effectiveness of the KBSM Curriculum. This can enable us to see how far learners are able to extend the experiential learning practices beyond school life and how far the National Education Philosophy is fulfilled and grounded in practical issues. The teacher dimension can be an issue to address in studying student participation. Studies of bigger samples should be under-taken to support the findings of this study. This can further cement the relationship between self-concept and experiential learning processes.

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APPENDIX A

Guidelines to Write Daily Journals:

1.   How did you feel during the role play sessions today?

2.   How did you feel about talking to the other students in the group?

3.   Was there any moment / event that you felt uncomfortable with:
      -the other students in the group?
      -the role that you played?

4.   Which role play did you like / enjoy most today? (if there were more than one) Why?

5.   Was there any session that you did not like? Why?

6.   Was the general class discussion useful?

7.   Did you learn anything from it? (i.e. class discussion)

8.   Do you see / feel any difference in yourself, as a result of the role play session today in comparison with the previous sessions?

APPENDIX B

Sample questions for the participants during the unstructured personal interviews:

Did you do group work when you were in secondary school?

How did your English Language teachers in the secondary school teach speaking? (i.e. methodology)

What sort of activities did you do in groups?

Have you done role play before? (i.e. secondary school)

What is your opinion about presenting the role plays in front of the class?

Do you have any public speaking experience, such as debates, drama, singing or any other stage performance?

Can you handle the different roles that you have to play? For example, when you play roles such as a boy, grandmother, husband or a mother, do these roles affect you?

Which person(s) do you feel most comfortable with when you do the role plays? Why?

Do you prefer to work in groups (more than two members) or in pairs?

What is your opinion of [the dominator s name]? How do you feel when you participate in group discussions with her?

Why were you drawing pictures (doodling) during the group discussion?

Which role play have you enjoyed most so far? Please tell me why you liked that particular role play.

Was there any role play that you did not like or did not feel comfortable with? Why?

Do you think you have experienced any change in yourself as a result of your participation in the role play activities? If yes, what is the most important change?
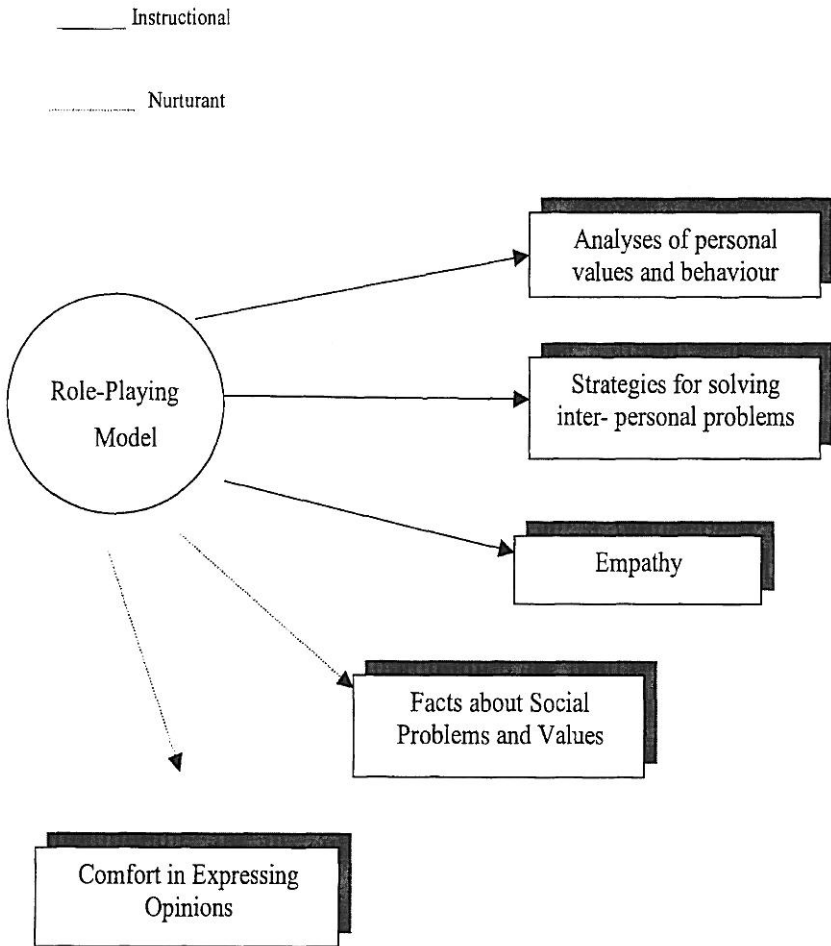
Is there anything negative about the role play sessions?

How do you feel about your English Language proficiency?

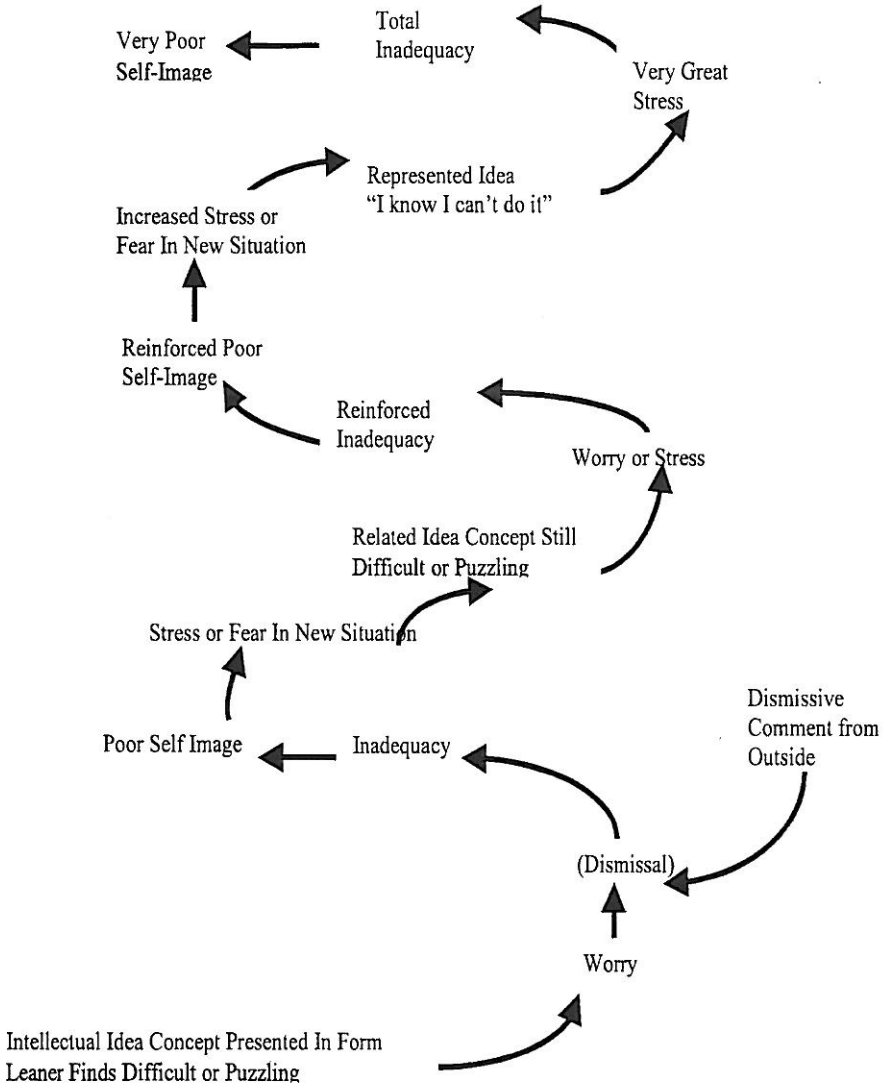Why did you remove your glasses during presentations?

What is your opinion of [the lecturer s name]?

APPENDIX C

_____ Instructional

·············· Nurturant

Instructional and Nurturant Effects: Role Playing Model (Joyce et al., 1992)

APPENDIX D

Very Poor
Self-Image

Total
Inadequacy

Very Great
Stress

Represented Idea
"I know I can't do it"

Increased Stress or
Fear In New Situation

Reinforced Poor
Self-Image

Reinforced
Inadequacy

Worry or Stress

Related Idea Concept Still
Difficult or Puzzling

Stress or Fear In New Situation

Poor Self Image

Inadequacy

Dismissive
Comment from
Outside

(Dismissal)

Worry

Intellectual Idea Concept Presented In Form
Leaner Finds Difficult or Puzzling

The Spiral Of Negative Learning (Thatcher, 1990)