

Role-play strategies in MFL



**Developing Students'
Communicative Competence**

START >

What does the Specification Say?

'In learning foreign languages, students are **actively engaged in activities and tasks** which integrate the five language skills of listening, reading, spoken production, spoken interaction and writing. As a result, they communicate with increasing independence, confidence and **creativity**. **As learning is a social activity as well as a personal one** and as communication is central to language, learning languages offers students ample **opportunities to work with others** to develop their language skills and achieve appropriate goals.'

(MFL Specification, p. 4)



'Junior cycle is inclusive of all students and contributes to equality of opportunity, **participation** and outcome for all.'

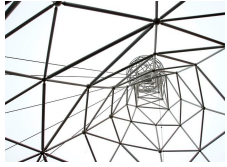
(MFL Specification, p. 3)

Click for strategies that support the development of all five language skills



Role-plays in MFL at Junior Cycle

Strategies to support the development of communicative competence



Scaffolds



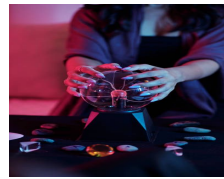
Simulations



Hot Seats



Scenarios



Tarot Readers



Real-plays

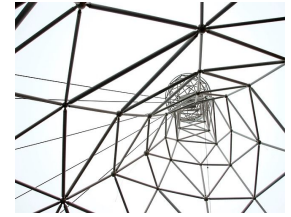


Please click on the blue icons to access the strategies

Scaffolding role-plays - supporting students in MFL



1. Photographs - can be the basis for any role-play activity. The photograph may be of the student themselves, someone else or objects etc. Alternatives to photographs are **illustrations, cartoons, emojis or speech bubbles** to prompt imaginative responses from students. Students in pairs or groups might share ideas about what is happening in the photograph. Students can also create **storyboards** around the photograph and record a digital story for their **portfolio**. Students might use dictionaries in groups to build some of the vocabulary required to collaboratively create the dialogues. Students might even imagine themselves as the photographer who took the photo.



2. Realia - these are real-life **authentic objects** brought into the classroom by students and/or teachers to support learning activities, for example food items, musical instruments, clothes, menus, etc. Realia can make activities more **hands-on** and inclusive for learners and can authenticity and make experience more engaging.

3. Cue-cards - to further scaffold the structure of the role-play, the teacher or student might wish to write short cue-cards to prompt the dialogue. These can be short character **profiles**, sentence **starters** or more in-depth sentences and **scripting**.



Simulations - supporting students in MFL



What is a simulation?

A simulation is a highly developed role-play, almost a **miniplay**, that is unscripted. The teacher sets up a simulated environment, such as a visit to the target language country.



How do you use a simulation?

A simulation is more involved than a single episode, such as making a hotel booking. In simulations, students may have to perform a **variety of activities**. The key is to structure the roles and action around a problem or series of problems. While a role play, might be just the conversation between the doctor and the patient, a simulation of going to the doctors might include a waiting room, a receptionist's desk, and a medical room. You can also extend your simulations to include a visit to the pharmacy for a prescription. **Virtual reality** is another possibility to support these learner experiences.

Why use simulation?

Simulations can create a vivid real-life **connection** between the classroom experience and the target language countries and cultures. Here is an example: Students are issued 'passports' and 'airline tickets' for their visit to a target language country. The chairs might be placed in a similar manner to airplane seating. Students could play 'security' and 'cabin crew' and students might also have 'guides' on their arrival to country etc. **Realia** could be also used to support these activities as appropriate.



Hot Seats - supporting students in MFL

What is hot seats?

A student is questioned by the group. Students might be **characters** and can be hot-seated individually, in pairs or small groups.

How do you use hot seats?

The traditional approach is for the student as himself/herself or playing the character to sit on a chair in front of the group, although characters may be hot-seated in pairs or groups. It is helpful if the teacher takes on the role of **facilitator** to guide the questioning in constructive directions. To help students begin you can try hot-seating children in pairs e.g. environmental protesters. If the background of the character is familiar to the students, then it may not be necessary for those playing the characters to do much preparation.

Why use hot seats?

The technique is particularly useful for developing **questioning skills** with students in groups. Although some roles may require more preparation, students can often use their own imagination supporting **creativity** in classroom.



Scenarios - supporting students in MFL

What are scenarios?

These are role-plays that can have a variety of approaches such as **problem solving**, decision-making, information-gap, cultural, context specific or **storytelling**; e.g. historical character.

How do you use scenarios?

Ideally the scenario will come from students **personal interests and hobbies**, e.g. music, holidays, sport that can provide opportunities for meaningful communication. Roles are assigned based on the scenario and rotated as much as possible, e.g. a tourist lost in their own town looking for directions. Scaffolding such as cue-cards and realia may be required while flexible enough to encourage students to communicate with spontaneity.

Why use scenarios?

The scenarios can provide students with opportunities to practice language skills in a communicative context. Scenarios are active learning experiences that promote **interaction and participation** which can enhance **motivation** and student confidence. Scenarios can also support the skills of **feedback and reflection**.



Tarot Readers - supporting students in MFL

What is a tarot reader?

Students listen and ask questions to other students who are making predictions. It can be done as a 'palm reader' without scaffolding or as 'tarot reader' with **cue-cards** for the student predicting the future and/or the students who are asking the questions.

How do you use tarot reader?

Together students discuss general questions they might ask a fortune teller and write them on a **placemat**. The teacher might elicit more specific questions that might be asked, e.g. Where will I visit? Will I be famous? etc. The teacher supports **open questions** with where, what, when, who and which to provide more opportunity for spontaneous communication. Students might be split into pairs or groups of fortune tellers and customers. After 2 minutes, the customers rotate to a new fortune teller. After customers have spoken to all fortune tellers, the teacher might take **group feedback** on what futures people were told.

Why use tarot reader?

The activity supports all skills with particular focus on **scaffolding** of grammar in context (future, conditional tenses). The technique is useful for developing questioning skills with students in groups and also retelling a **story** of what happened.



Real-plays - supporting students in MFL



What is a real-play?

Situations and one or more of the characters are drawn not from cards, but from a **participant's own life and world.**

One of the learners plays him/herself, but in a **context other than the classroom.**



How do you use real-play?

Ideally, rather than a set of role cards, the most useful tool of real-play is an open framework, e.g.: (involving 2 people)

Who are the 2 people?

Where are you?

What are you talking about?

Why are you talking? etc.

Why use real-play?

The real-play technique allows learners to practise language they need in their own life in a more **challenging** manner. They also support language learner **autonomy** and develop language learner **identity.**

Adapted from - Scrivener, J. (2005). Learning Teaching: A guidebook for English language teachers, UK: Macmillan Publishers Limited.

