

What Can Replacement Performance Role-Plays Tell Us About Our Students' Communicative  
Competence?

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Submitted to the School of Human Sciences  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
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**Nota de Responsabilidad**

Las ideas y conclusiones aportadas en este Trabajo de Grado son responsabilidad del autor.

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**Nota de Aceptación**

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Firma del Jurado

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### **Resumen**

Este documento de investigación explora la noción de competencia comunicativa y la necesidad de incorporar “Tasks” (Tareas) comunicativas e interactivas para mejorar las prácticas de evaluación en Colombia. A este respecto, se propone el uso de "Replacement Performance Role-plays", un enfoque alternativo para el uso de "Role-plays" (Juegos de Rol) como un elemento de evaluación adicional y alternativo para mejorar y medir la competencia comunicativa del Inglés de los estudiantes en las aulas de escuela secundaria en Colombia. En este sentido, se revisan los conceptos de evaluación basada en el desempeño, rúbricas, conferencias, autoevaluación y juegos de roles para servir de base para la adaptación de esta estrategia de enseñanza-aprendizaje.

**Abstract**

This research paper explores the notion of communicative competence and the need of incorporating communicative and interactive tasks for improving the assessment practices in Colombia. In this respect, the use of Replacement Performance Role-Plays as an additional and alternative assessing element for enhancing and better measuring the students' communicative competence in EFL high school classrooms in Colombia is proposed. In this sense, the concepts of performance-based assessment, rubrics, conferences, peer and self-assessment and role-plays are reviewed for serving as the basis for the adaptation of this teaching-learning strategy.

## Table of Contents

What can Replacement Performance Role-Plays tell us about our students’ Communicative Competence? .....	9
Communicative Competence .....	10
Communicative Language Testing .....	13
Performance-based Assessment.....	14
Rubrics .....	16
Self-assessment and Peer-assessment.....	17
Conferences and Interviews.....	17
Performance-Based Assessment in EFL high school Classrooms in Colombia.....	19
Role-Play.....	20
Replacement Performance Role-Plays.....	22
Why using Replacement Performance Role-Plays? .....	23
Pedagogical proposal: Some Initial Considerations .....	25
Procedure: .....	26
Steps.....	26
Stages.....	28
Conclusions.....	32
References.....	34

Appendix A..... 42

Appendix B..... 43



## **What can Replacement Performance Role-Plays tell us about our students' Communicative Competence?**

Nowadays, there is a global need for attaining a suitable level of proficiency in English (Richards, 2006). In Colombia, the case has been set through the implementation of a series of Programs aiming at developing the English Communicative Competence of students starting at Elementary school and throughout their whole academic life until University level (Ministry of National Education-MEN, 2006). However, studies show that this objective has not been entirely achieved and that the general English proficiency level of the students in high schools in Colombia is still a matter of concern (Sánchez-Jabba, 2012, 2013).

In this respect, one of the things we need to bear in mind is that, far from being an isolated component inside the teaching and learning process, assessment can have a direct effect on the development of the students' English communicative competence, considering that the learning styles, interests, motivation and goals of students are highly influenced by the way this process is carried out (Hipo, 2017). In this sense, Hipo (2017) has pointed out the need of going beyond the more traditional forms of assessment to start implementing assessment practices based on authentic and communicative tasks that can give students more opportunities for practicing and demonstrating their knowledge and skills and serve at the same time the purpose of informing teachers about the actual level of their students' competence.

Nonetheless, it may be probable that many EFL teachers in Colombia limit their assessment practices to the use of translation exercises, drills, paper-and-pencil tests, and other rather traditional forms of assessment that do not favor the student's learning and motivation due mainly to the limiting conditions in the majority of our classrooms and institutions, all too often characterized by the large numbers of students per class, the lack of instructional materials, the

little time that is usually devoted to English instruction and the low motivation of the students due, among other things, to the absence of a communicative need for learning a foreign language (Bastidas, 2002, 2017; Bonilla & Cruz-Arcila, 2014; Corzo & Contreras, 2011; Guerrero, 2015; Ortiz & Cuéllar, 2018; Pineda, 2014).

In this spirit, the main objective of this paper is to provide the reader with a pedagogical proposal based on the implementation of Replacement Performance Role-Plays, a communicative and interactive task teachers can use to enhance and assess the students' English communicative competence in high school settings in Colombia.

To this end, the concept of Communicative Competence in language teaching and learning will be briefly explored in the first section of this paper in order to understand some of its implications for language testing and assessment. After that, some insights on performance-based assessment in conjunction with some other alternatives in assessment and tools that can be used to determine the learners' communicative competence will be studied to serve as the basis for the implementation of replacement performance role-plays. Next, a short definition of role-play and replacement performance role-plays will be presented along with some points on the advantages and benefits of the use of this type of activities. Finally, the last section of this paper will focus on providing the reader with some ideas and necessary steps for adapting and using this teaching-learning strategy of replacement performance role-plays to be used as an additional and alternative assessment element in our contexts.

### **Communicative Competence**

Communicative Competence has been for many years one of the most studied terms in language teaching and testing. This particular concept was first introduced by Hymes (1972) that not conforming with Chomsky's (1965) limiting view concerning the notion of Competence,

considered that a proper conceptualization of the term should account for the social and cultural aspects of language use. Thus, Hymes (1972) employed the concept of Communicative Competence to designate not merely the ability to structure language correctly, but to use it appropriately in different communicative contexts and situations.

Later, Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) would assimilate this notion into a model in which they conceived the concept as a construct composed of four main elements: Grammatical Competence, alluding to the dominion of the language code; Sociolinguistic Competence, related to the capacity to produce appropriate language in any given situation; Strategic competence, dealing with the ability to apply different resources or strategies to preserve and maintain communication; and Discourse Competence, linked to the ability to structure language and ideas in a logical and functional way.

From there, Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996) would build a more complex model revolving around a new concept, namely, Language Ability, a construct composed of two broad components: Language knowledge and Strategic competence.

Language knowledge, on one hand, is described here as comprising two basic elements: Organizational Knowledge and Pragmatic Knowledge. Organizational Knowledge includes in itself two basic elements, namely, Grammatical knowledge, consisting of areas such as vocabulary, syntax and phonology required for the construction and interpretation of correct sentences and utterances, and Textual knowledge, defined in terms of the language conversions, cohesion, rhetorical and conversational organization needed for joining sentences and utterances into written and oral texts. In the same line, Pragmatic knowledge is associated in this model with the abilities implied in constructing and interpreting discourse. This includes Functional knowledge, required for the expression of acceptable language functions, and Sociolinguistic

knowledge, which designates the social and linguistic conventions necessary for the creation and interpretation of appropriate language at a particular context where language is used.

Strategic competence, on the other hand, is described as an assemblage of metacognitive components involved in language use. Here three basic elements are highlighted: Goal setting, expressed as the identification of a task; Assessment, related to the previous and posterior evaluation of the elements required for its execution; and Planning, linked to the chosen course of action for carrying it out.

Currently, the Council of Europe (2001) divides the term of communicative competence into three major competences: linguistic, Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic. Here, these competences imply in themselves not only a certain knowledge, but also the learners' ability to apply it.

In this sense, Linguistic competence includes knowledge of areas such as lexical, grammatical, semantic and phonological and the capacity to use them in order to produce and understand correct messages. In the same line, Sociolinguistic competence can be understood as the knowledge of the code and the ability to use it appropriately in a social context. Some important elements we can find inside this competence are for instance, the conventions, expressions, register dialect and accent of a language. Finally, Pragmatic competence can be broken down into three basic competences: Discourse, Functional and Design, all of them related to the knowledge and the skills concerning the language structures and functions.

So far, it can be noted that the notion of communicative competence has gradually evolved to comprise a rather wide range of aspects and components. In this light, we turn now to explore very briefly some of its implications for language testing and assessment and its role regarding the eventual rise of performance-based assessment as an assessment alternative.

### **Communicative Language Testing**

More than three decades ago, the language teaching field began to realize the limitations in the use of Standardized Testing and other traditional forms of assessment for measuring the learners' abilities (Brown, 2004; Hamayan, 1995; Shohamy, 1995). Ever since Canale and Swain (1980) proposed their theoretical framework for communicative competence to the subsequent development of the concept by Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996), it is possible to observe how the knowledge provided by these authors created the need in the field of language teaching of going beyond the traditional tests for the sake of assessing learners in a more valid form (Wigglesworth, 2008). This was mainly due to the fact that language tests at that time were rather limiting and usually characterized by the use of mechanical drills and artificial language (Shohamy, 1995). These and other problems and limitations including anxiety as well as the very applicability of the tests themselves in different contexts brought a great amount of criticism to language testing (Brown, 2004; Huerta-Macías, 2002). In this respect, authors like Wiggins (1989) began to advocate for more authentic assessment practices arguing that tests were "rarely designed to be authentic tests of intellectual ability" (p. 43). In consequence, there was a progressive move from the more traditional forms of tests to the construction and use of communicative tests with a broader scope that involved students producing and using authentic and communicative language (Shohamy, 1995). In this regard, the subsequent development of authentic and communicative tasks that could account for language use in real situations and the knowledge provided by the different works on communicative competence and its components gave rise to the eventual synthesis and integration of different Alternatives in Assessment such as Performance-based assessment in our field (Brown, 2004; Shohamy, 1995; Wigglesworth, 2008).

As it can be observed from what has been previously mentioned, the notion of Performance-based assessment is not entirely new (Wigglesworth, 2008). Indeed, this type of assessment has been used very often to determine students' mastery of knowledge in other fields of education (Colley, 2008). After all, as Brown (2004) reminds us, testing is but an expression of the many alternatives to assessment at our disposal. In this light, we will continue analyzing this specific type of alternative in assessment to serve as the basis for the implementation of replacement performance role-plays.

### **Performance-based Assessment**

In general terms, Performance-based assessment can be described as a call for the engagement of students around different interactive tasks that normally come close to reality (Brown & Hudson, 1998). In this sense, this particular technique can comprise different activities such as "interviews, oral reports, role plays, describing, explaining, summarizing, retelling, paraphrasing stories or text material, and so on" (Tannenbaum, 1996, p. 5).

As some theoretical bases that support the use of performance-based assessment, we can mention the works of Larsen-Freeman and Long (1994) and Lightbown and Spada (2006) who point out the importance of social interaction and an appropriate environment that stimulates and supports the use of language for actively communicating and expressing ideas, thoughts and intentions. In this sense, performance-based assessment becomes relevant because through the use of the tasks this alternative offers, learners are naturally exposed to the target language and challenged to interact with others, making evident the extent to which they can actually use language (Huerta-Macías, 2002).

In a similar vein, authors such as Brown and Hudson (1998), Huerta-Macías (2002), Gottlieb (2006) and Miller, Linn, and Gronlund (2008) have noted as some significant

advantages in the use of this type of assessment the possibility for students to produce and use real language and abilities in authentic real-like scenarios. As for teachers this alternative can assist them in the assessment of both, process product, thus getting a clearer insight of the quality of the students' language and skills. Indeed, as Wiggins (1989) affirms, demonstration, as a feature of authentic and performance-based assessment encourages students to display “not merely their knowledge but their initiative; not merely their problem solving but problem posing; not just their learning on cue but their ability to judge and learn how to learn on an open-ended problem” (p. 43). This argument can be linked to the fact that this alternative normally require students to employ higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and critical thinking when creating the responses and performing the tasks (Gottlieb, 2006; VanTassel-Baska, 2013).

In this respect, diverse studies show that the use of performance-based assessment is key to enhance students' learning since it can offer them more possibilities for fully demonstrating their abilities in different ways (Adair-Hauck, Glisan, Koda, Swender, & Sandrock, 2006; Elmiana, 2017; Qutaishat & Bataineh, 2014). Yildirim and Orsdemir (2013), for instance, concluded that performance tasks do have a positive effect in students' learning, leading them to increase their motivation and self-confidence. In addition, studies like the ones conducted by Adair-Hauck et al. (2006) and Glisan, Uribe, and Adair-Hauck (2007) indicate how through the application of performance-based assessment, teachers can provide students and other interested parties with a more appropriate and opportune feedback, enhance the teaching and learning practices, and connect instruction and assessment in a more effective way.

So far, we can note that performance-based assessment presents several benefits in its application. However, in accordance with authors like Brown and Hudson (1998), Brown (2004) and Miller et al. (2008), designing and using this type of assessment can be rather difficult, time-

consuming and expensive. In addition, reliability and validity issues such as raters' subjectivity or answers' variability might arise when using this kind of alternatives. Hence, it is essential for teachers to treat performance-based assessment with caution (Brown, 2004). In this respect, Brown (2004), Gottlieb (2006) and Miller et al. (2008) agree on the importance of employing some additional tools and alternatives such as rubrics, peer-assessment and self-assessment in order to complement, support and enhance its implementation and effectiveness. In this regard we will focus our attention on the study of these particular aids.

### **Rubrics**

Rubrics can be seen as a supporting tool commonly used with performance-based assessment for recording and interpreting students' work (Andrade, 1997; Gottlieb, 2006; Mertler, 2001). In general terms, rubrics can be defined as rating scales containing precise and predetermined criteria which is employed as a reference for assessing learners (Mertler, 2001). In this regard, it can be stated that these tools play an important role by establishing agreements between teachers and students regarding tasks and performance (Gottlieb, 2006).

As some general advantages with regards to the application of rubrics acknowledged by Andrade (1997), we can mention the possibility of improving the work of students by setting from the beginning a clear set of criteria, the facility it gives teachers for keeping track of students, the decrease of the time employed for assessment and the chance for teachers to give students clearer feedback regarding their strengths and weaknesses.

In this respect, research on the implementation of rubrics have shown, indeed, a positive effect on students' performance and learning by means of giving teachers the chance to offer students valuable feedback, identify their weaknesses and enhance their learning process (Becker, 2016; Chan, Inoue, & Taylor, 2015). In consequence, authors like Jácome (2013) have promoted



in Colombia, the use of rubrics for more fair, valid and clear assessment practices in our context. In fact, studies like the one conducted by Pineda (2014), have demonstrated the relevance of the use of rubrics for assessment in terms of practicality and meaningful learning.

### **Self-assessment and Peer-assessment**

In accordance with Brown and Hudson (1998), we can define these types of alternative assessment techniques as processes in which students are asked to rate their work and reflect on the way they think they or their peers have responded or could respond to a given situation or a piece of their own work. To this end, Miller et al. (2008) suggests guiding this practice with the use of rubrics, thus making easier for students to identify problems on their work and others' work. This in turn can instill in students a sense of responsibility for their own learning.

In this vein, Díaz (2009) concluded in a study involving these techniques that their use can also give students a more tangible sense of collaboration and the willingness to accept other people's ideas and opinions (Díaz, 2009). In addition, Restrepo (2013) found that self-assessment can contribute to students' metacognition awareness and self-regulation development, being this an excellent form to assess aspects such as students' effort and beliefs. Moreover, Rizvi (2016) came to the conclusion that self-assessment can provide teachers with significant information on the way students perceive their proficiency with regards to their communicative competence. Finally, Birjandi and Siyyari (2010) concluded in their research in an Iranian university that both alternatives can enhance considerably students' learning and motivation by means of letting them take part actively in their own assessment.

### **Conferences and Interviews**

Conferences can be defined in general terms as meetings held between teachers and students (Brown & Hudson, 1998). In this sense, conferences can serve a broad range of

functions like revising students' work, counseling and providing feedback (Brown, 2004). In addition, interviews as a particular kind of conference offer a discovering of students facets.

As a significant point, it should be noted here that just like it has been previously mentioned, this kind of alternatives are normally used as a supporting tool rather than as an alternative per se. In this light, due to its formative nature, they are not commonly rated (Brown & Hudson, 1998). However, these alternatives must not be taken lightly as simple conversations. Indeed, questions as well as the whole structure of the interview or the conference itself need to be prepared carefully based on the user's purpose and objectives (Brown, 2004).

With regard to the application of conferences, Baleghizadeh and Zarghami (2012) concluded in their study that conferences can help students become autonomous learners and stay motivated, thus enhancing their learning. Likewise, a study on the students' perception towards their learning conducted by Restrepo (2013) in a Colombian university, lets us see the role conferences can play at gathering information on students' performance as well as at guiding students through their reflections on their own progress and learning.

From what has been reviewed thus far, it is possible to perceive several benefits in the use of performance-based assessment expressed in terms of the communication and interaction this alternative promotes in the classroom. In addition, we can appreciate several advantages and benefits in the use of rubrics or conferences to overcome issues like finding time for assessment and ensuring rating objectivity, all of them related to the use of performance-based assessment (Miller et al., 2008). In this light, we will turn now to consider some of the implications of the integration of this type of assessment in our context.

### **Performance-Based Assessment in EFL high school Classrooms in Colombia**

In accordance with the National Ministry of Education, communicative competence cannot be developed in an isolated way. In this sense, performance-based assessment can be considered a logical element to adopt in order to achieve the goals of the government (Sánchez & Obando, 2008). Nonetheless, as Sánchez and Obando (2008) states, implementing this type of assessment can be tricky if we consider, for instance, the difficulty of the Colombian working conditions or the use of tests where translation exercises and the use of the L1 are the norm. In consequence, it can be stated that introducing alternatives in assessment such as performance-based assessment in our context is a major challenge that requires more research as well as some important curricular changes along with the complete support of the government (Sánchez & Obando, 2008). Yet, as Mendoza and Arandia (2009) assert, we should start improving our “assessment practices to enhance the quality of language education and students’ motivation for learning”. In this regard, it is important for us to consider the view of “assessment for learning rather than assessment of learning” (p. 66). At the same time, we cannot forget that for now, both traditional and alternative ways for assessing students are necessary if we intend to assist our students in their learning processes in a more consistent way (Brown, 2004; Huerta-Macias, 2002). In this line of thinking, the discussion will turn now to the analysis of the concept of replacement performance role-plays, an innovative approach for the use of one of the most popular performance-based assessment techniques with the aim of providing the reader with one possible solution for the improvement of the assessment practices inside our classrooms. For this, the concept of role-play is first explored.

### **Role-Play**

Budden (2004) defines role-play as any speaking task in which students either put themselves in someone else's shoes or continue being themselves but facing an imaginary situation. In the same line, Kodotchigova (2002) explains that role-plays differ from other type of drama activities like simulations in that they ask students to assume a role they do not play in the real world. For this, students are to adjust their language to this new context (Ur, 2009).

Role-plays can be carried out in pairs or groups that may perform or not for an audience like teachers or the entire class. For this, students are given a situation accompanied of a problem or task and assigned specific roles that, as an option, can be summarized in cards (Ur, 2009). Some example of roles students can play are: "a customer, a manager" or "a shop assistant", as for situations, we can consider ideas such as "buying things from a shop" or "asking for directions" (Gower, Phillips, & Walters, 2009, p. 105).

Concerning the application of this technique, a variety of studies regarding the use of role-plays as a tool for learning in EFL contexts have concluded that role-plays have the potential for creating a suitable environment that can motivate students to learn a foreign language, provide students with a more extensive practice, give students more opportunities to express themselves, bring the outside world inside the classroom, let students perceive language as an actual tool and provide a better space for making mistakes and correcting them (Alzboun, Smadi, & Baniabdelrahman, 2017; Castrillón, 2003; Kemboi & Osman, 2015; Liu & Ding, 2009; Mandasari, 2017)

In a similar vein, some studies concerning the use of role-plays as an assessment tool seem to point out the relevance of this type of alternatives. After a comparison study of production questionnaires and role-plays, for example, Sasaki (1998) came to the conclusion that

even though role-plays are less practical than production questionnaires and that “a production questionnaire score cannot simply be substituted for a role-play score”, role-plays can result in “a more valid means for making inferences regarding examinees' true pragmatic competence” due to its communicative nature (p. 479). In the same line, Kormos (1999) found that role-plays can provide learners with more chances to display different conversational abilities like “performing openings and closings, initiating and rejecting topics, as well as interrupting” unlike non-scripted interviews that are often characterized by an “unequal distribution of power” (p. 183). In this light, we can perceive more clearly the importance in the use of different assessment strategies for assessing and interpreting the work of the students (Brown & Hudson, 1998). After all, as Sasaki (1998) concluded, we cannot base our inferences about students' competence only on one assessment technique.

So far, it can be noted here that the implementation of role-plays in language teaching and assessment offers us different advantages. However, as Snarski (2007) points out, the way role-play are used entails still some drawbacks like the usual difficulties at monitoring students when working with large classes, students' attitude concerning the way they perceive the tasks which can cause writer's blockage or stage fright and other implementation factors like the additional tasks that are normally required for the observers in order to ensure students' focus and involvement. In fact, Mandasari (2017), for example, reported that one of the things she had to sort out when using role-plays was the shyness of some students when it came to act out their roles in front of their peers. Consequently, Snarski (2007) has proposed what she calls “Replacement Performance Role-Plays”, an innovative approach to sort out most of the problems found with the usual practices in which role-plays are used.

### **Replacement Performance Role-Plays**

Replacement performance role plays can be defined as a recent variation of the more traditional role-play formats. This strategy uses acted-out or projected scenes portraying a provoking event meant to engage students in a discussion regarding the course of action taken by the characters (Snarski, 2007). Here, the students are asked for advice, possible solutions or comments about the plot of the story and how it should be solved. Later, students are to replace a character in the scene showing how they think the situation could be solved. At this point, the character should respond and act according to the situation and its circumstances. For this, students are to explore possible outcomes of the scene by changing the lines of the character that is replaced in relation to the other characters. As a result, the scene can take different turns (Snarski, 2007).

In accordance with Snarski (2007), some of the advantages at using replacement performance role plays reside in the way these are constructed and presented which causes in students a natural disposition to respond and seek a better outcome than the one they are presented. Regarding stage fright and shyness, this particular technique offers better conditions for less confident students to offer their opinions, take risks at performing and collaborating with their peers. As for the usual task for the audience, it can be said that due to the provoking element of the plot and the scene, not only are students naturally engaged in paying attention and reacting to it, but also, allowed to perceive it as a real and tangible problem solving task. That is, a challenge instead of a simple chore. Indeed, by rewriting the lines and seeing how the story changes, students can become aware of the relevance and use of writing and speaking as invaluable tools (Snarski, 2007).

Another advantage of this approach acknowledged by Snarski (2007) is the applicability with regard to the diverse levels of proficiency students may have. Indeed, this has been mentioned by Sánchez and Obando (2008) as one of the issues that can prevent teachers from using alternatives in assessment. In this sense, this particular technique becomes useful because when rewriting the lines of the character to be replaced, groups can be created so that the dialogue is constructed attending everyone's opinions, suggestions and ideas, thus involving all students and exposing less proficient students to language practice. In addition, those students with a lower level of proficiency, for instance, may be encouraged to perform using less vocabulary and complement their performance with more gestures. This matches Tannenbaum's (1996)s idea of Physical Demonstrations as a way for helping students express themselves without the need of using the target language. Therefore, students can gain confidence on their skills and take part actively in this activity (Snarski, 2007).

With regard to the application of this new approach for role-plays, we must say that there is not much research or studies on this specific technique that support its use, especially as an assessment tool. However, taking into account the results of the previous studies on role-plays above mentioned, the additional aids that can be used with this type of performance-based assessments and the current educational situation in Colombia, it is possible to say that this specific technique can yield possible results not only as a teaching strategy but also as an additional and alternative assessing element.

### **Why using Replacement Performance Role-Plays?**

Different authors like Mendoza and Arandia (2009), Del Campo, Bonilla, and Ahumada (2010) and Muñoz, Palacio, and Escobar (2012) have called for the implementation of formative assessments that can contribute to the improvement of the teaching and learning process. It has

been shown that the integration of genuine and meaningful activities, assignments and tasks like games, interviews and role-plays can help to light the way to more continuous and constructive assessment practices and the creation of a dynamic environment that promotes meaningful learning and the development of the students' communicative competence in a slow but conscious pace (Del Campo et al., 2010; Ortiz & Cuéllar, 2018).

In this regard, an important idea in the use of this kind of role plays in accordance with Snarski (2007) is the development of pragmatic competence, a basic and key component of communicative competence. Since replacement performance role plays portray real situations that can be supported by scenes taken from popular TV shows and movies, students can easily be given the opportunities to become aware of the small details and features a language comprises such as intonation, stress, tone, expressions and other cultural elements and the role these elements play when communicating with others. This is, in fact, an important point since, just like the author mentions, authors like Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei (1998) have found that in EFL contexts, teachers and students tend to give more importance to the grammatical aspects of the language as opposed to ESL contexts where the focus tends to be more on the pragmatic facet. Indeed, using this type of tasks can give learners the chance to put to the test all the grammatical and sociolinguistic competences as well (Council of Europe, 2001).

Finally, one of the main reasons why replacement performance role-plays can be of great help both for enhancing and assessing students' competence is because these can promote the use of critical thinking skills and creativity. Regarding Bloom's (1984) taxonomy, Snarski (2007) explains how critical thinking skills are employed:

Knowledge and comprehension skills, for example, are used at the beginning, when students get in groups and share and compare their ideas in relation to the situation in the scene



they just saw. Application and analysis skills are employed for understanding the characters and deciding what course of action they should take. Synthesis skills are used when rewriting the lines of the character to be replaced based on their knowledge. Finally, evaluation skills can be used in the final stage for discussing the different performances and their features (p. 7).

Up to this point, some of the most relevant reasons for implementing replacement performance role-plays have been studied. Following the purpose of this paper we will focus our attention now on formulating a pedagogical proposal for the use of this strategy in our context.

### **Pedagogical proposal: Some Initial Considerations**

One of the first things we need to take into account in order to use this particular strategy is that in most educational institutions in Colombia, the concept of alternative assessment may not be common place or might be a rejected practice (Mendoza & Arandia, 2009). In addition, the tendency to see assessment as an end-term procedure can be rather high (Muñoz et al., 2012). In consequence, it would be necessary to introduce directors, teachers, parents and students to this performance-based assessment strategy, its benefits, its requirements and its purpose. In the same line, prior knowledge and training on rubrics as well as conferencing, peer and self-assessment must be provided. This in turn will add to the effectiveness of this element (Athimoolam, 2004; Brown, 2004).

Concerning its implementation, this strategy can be designed as a series of short activities along each school term. For this, time for instruction and assessment must be rearranged. As for its requirements, analytic rubrics need to be created or adapted so that they contain clear criteria for the process and the performance with regard to the three major components of communicative competence proposed by the Council of Europe (2001) which serves as the basis for the requirements of the National Ministry of Education (see Appendix A). For this, syllabus

and course objectives must be studied (Andrade, 1997; Hamayan, 1995; Mertler, 2001; Miller et al., 2008). In this sense, there should be three types of rubrics: a student rubric, a teacher rubric and a peer rubric.

For the construction of each role-play, a series of real-life situations that are likely to arise in the students the need for expressing an opinion or making a decision must be chosen. For this, it is advisable to use scenes from movies or sitcoms as a starting point. This, in turn, will contribute to the involvement of the students and give them the chance to demonstrate and be aware of their competence. Some examples proposed by Snarski (2007) are: "a taxi driver finding an envelope after dropping off a passenger" or "a student asking to cheat off of a classmate during an exam" (p. 5). An important point to be mentioned here is that every scene should be chosen taking into account the objectives of the course, the vocabulary implied and more importantly the expected outcome based on the linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic components (Miller et al., 2008). Yet, it is important to note here that not all elements can be anticipated and assessed (see Appendix B). In this sense, teachers need to be flexible and bear in mind the complexity of language and the benefits this strategy can bring in terms of students' learning.

**Procedure:**

With the aim of adapting this teaching strategy, a set of steps and stages based on the previous work by Snarski (2007) are provided.

**Steps.**

For the first step, it is required to write the story for the scene. It is recommended to keep it short without missing any details that could add to the plot of the story. Depending on the situation and the storyline, the scene can last a maximum of ten minutes with little or no props

used. As a recommendable option here, scenes from sitcoms or films are to be used as a starting point (Snarski, 2007). In this part, students' language proficiency level, vocabulary, communicative components and functions of the language and performance should be anticipated. In consequence, it is convenient to expose students to the new vocabulary and other language elements before the scene is presented (Athiemoolam, 2004).

Subsequently, it is necessary to find people that can perform the role-play. This part is rather flexible in that it can be carried out by outside people like other teachers, parents or colleagues. Additionally, using good or any students from the class willing to take part in the performance is a good idea as students get already involved (Snarski, 2007).

As a final step, it is key to have enough practice so the actors can alter their lines in relation to the dialogue of the replaced character. Due to the nature of the role-play, it does not require much practice. However, it is important for actors to have their roles clear and maybe prepare some possible lines to be delivered (Snarski, 2007).

After the performance, the idea is for students to replace one of the characters by changing the lines for their own and demonstrate how they would act if they had to face the same situation. When using scenes from sitcoms and other sources, students can be asked to predict the actions and write the lines of a character to be replaced, and then, enter the performance. At the end, students can watch the whole original scene, compare their performances and discuss their impressions regarding different aspects like cultural or pragmatic points, for instance (Snarski, 2007).

As additional ideas and practice, Snarski (2007) suggests making little changes in the character's personality, for example, and see how it works. Also, for students with a more advanced proficiency level, it can be possible to let them play the role of the characters that

needs to react to the replaced character while a non-verbal part can be written in the scene for lower proficiency level students.

### **Stages.**

In the first stage, the story is introduced with some details for students to get a schema. This can be helpful for less proficient students (Snarski, 2007). Additionally, students need to be told about the activity and what is expected of them. In this sense, students must be conscious of the components that communicative competence entails and what it implies to be competent in communicative terms. At this point, peer rubrics must be delivered and explained. Finally, it is important for students to become aware of the nature of this strategy and see in it an opportunity to perform without feeling any pressure as there is not an absolute right or wrong answer in this type of assessment (Wigglesworth, 2008).

For the second stage, students need to concentrate on the scene and the plot. Here, some spare time must be anticipated so the performance can be repeated if necessary, thus giving students a better comprehension of the story (Snarski, 2007). At this point, the character that is going to be replaced must be selected. It can be easier to select one character for all groups. As a helpful resource, students can be given a copy of the scene script. This in turn will become a starting point for the next stage. At this stage, teachers can assess students' comprehension with regards to their ability to perceive language elements such as intonation, gestures and expression present in the scene, the same elements that can be linked to the sociolinguistic component.

In the third stage, students are led to reflect on the situation portrayed. Here, it is advisable to organize students in small groups. The idea is for them to cooperate by sharing their perceptions on the characters, their actions and personalities and their thoughts about how they or others would or should act if they or others were in such a situation. After this, students write

together some lines or a brief dialogue for the character that is going to be replaced. This new dialogue can be studied and read a few times until students feel comfortable with the product. Here teachers should help students with any doubts or problems and encourage them to anticipate the changes in the lines of the other characters as well. This can be beneficial as shy or low proficiency students can enrich and cooperate with the activity without feeling the pressure of stepping out and performing immediately. In addition, this can provide students with an easier writing practice as students can get more comfortable rewriting the lines of one character rather than a full dialogue for the entire scene (Snarski, 2007). At this stage, this type of role-plays can inform us about the students' ability to organize and produce language with a particular intention that is coherent with the situation portrayed in the scene, all of them concerned with the three components of communicative competence.

In the fourth stage, the scene is repeated. The replaced character enters with the new lines until the other characters cannot go on with their original lines and the conversation turns. Here starts the interactive part of the role-play because, far from being a predetermined and fixed dialogue to be delivered, students need to respond right away to what the other characters say and do, trying to keep at the same time the personality traits of the characters being played. Here, students are called to improvise but with the difference that they already know the dialogue, the lines of the characters, and some ideas on the reaction they can get. Furthermore, it is possible for other students to take the role of the character if the student performing finds the improvisation too difficult. The idea, then, is for teachers to identify the problems that lead the performance and the character to get stuck and use this for a later discussion on different levels about how it could be sorted out (Snarski, 2007). During this stages, teachers and students must take part actively in the assessment of the performance of every student inside each group. The

idea is to have groups assess one another (peer-assessment) while teachers assess each group. Also, students are encouraged to share their opinions after each group performance.

This specific stage is crucial since all components of communicative competence plus elements such as creativity and critical thinking can be assessed through the actual performances of students. In this respect, Replacement Performance Role-Plays can inform us about different aspects concerning our student's competences, ranging from their actual ability for using and applying them to their strengths and weaknesses with regards to their progress and learning and the way it can be improved. In this sense, it is important to include in the analytic rubrics previously elaborated all the necessary criteria reflecting what we expect from our students' performance in relation to the language competences we want to measure.

The final stage consists of a series of conferences which can take place right after all performances as a close up. Otherwise, these conferences can be programmed during the course of a week or two. Here students are asked for their impressions on their own performances (self-assessment). After that, the overall assessment is compared to the ones of their classmates and teachers and transmitted to the students (feedback). Here, optional grades or marks as well as some suggestions and final comments for future performances and areas of improvement should be provided. Finally, teachers can compare the results with those of the usual test and exams as a complement for the whole assessment process. In addition, teachers and students can use this information for what can be changed inside the teaching and learning process.

In general, we need to bear in mind that for any of the previous stages, it is key to prepare a clear rubric in advance and present it to the students before the activities so that they know what elements they need to pay attention to when they are developing them. Also, we need to take into account that the promotion of this particular technique is with the aim of serving as an

additional element along with the usual assessment practices as we cannot base our inferences about our students' communicative competence on only one assessment strategy.

Finally, the author of this paper would like to encourage the reader to dive deeper into the benefits and necessary requirements concerning the implementation of performance-based assessment with the aim of improving our assessment practices for the sake of our students' learning.

### **Conclusions**

The attainment of a suitable communicative competence has become one of the main concerns in our context. In this regard, this paper has provided some insights on the complex nature of this construct, letting us appreciate some of its implications for language teaching and testing and the appropriateness in introducing alternatives to the usual assessment practices in high school settings in Colombia as a logical element for meeting the goals of the government.

Additionally, this research document reviewed some of the issues and circumstances that gave rise to the current communicative and alternative trends in assessment, all of which, speak to us about the importance in going beyond the usual paper-and-pencil tests which are but one of the many alternatives we can use for determining our students' language abilities.

In line with what has been stated above, the concept of performance-based assessment has been studied with the aim of expanding our understanding concerning assessment and the way we can improve our assessment practices. In this respect, we can now observe how by means of integrating this type of alternative we can not only evaluate our students in a more precise and appropriate form, but also, we can contribute to increase their motivation and enhance their learning.

Moreover, this paper explored some of the most common issues that entail the use of this kind of alternatives. To this end, some additional aids like rubrics and self-assessment were reviewed so that teachers can reflect on some of the ways they can support and enhance the implementation and effectiveness of this assessment alternative. Nonetheless, it is clear that, due to the current limiting conditions in our country, the implementation of this type of alternatives implies further research and the support and commitment of the government that can lead us to



adjust our curriculums and teaching methodologies (Sánchez & Obando, 2008). In addition, it has been stated that for now, both traditional and alternative ways for assessment are necessary.

In this sense, this document has proposed the use of Replacement Performance Role-plays, an innovative approach for one of the most popular performance-based assessment formats that can be used in conjunction with other alternatives to better determine and enhance our students' English communicative competence, sorting out, in this way, some of the most common difficulties presented in the ways in which role-plays are commonly used as well as some of the problems and issues inside our classrooms such as the large numbers of students per class and the limited time devoted to English instruction and assessment.

In addition, some advantages concerning the development and assessment of the students' communicative competence through the use of this type of role-play such as the possibility of assessing students through their actual performance were expressed in this paper. However, in order to actually observe the results of this particular technique, it would be necessary to conduct an experimental study in order to be able to draw more reliable conclusions on the benefits of using this particular technique, considering the difficult teaching and learning conditions of our contexts.

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## Appendix A

## Analytic rubric template

Template for analytic rubrics					
	<b>Beginning 1</b>	<b>Developing 2</b>	<b>Accomplished 3</b>	<b>Exemplary 4</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>Criteria #1</b>	Description reflecting beginning level of performance	Description reflecting movement toward mastery level of performance	Description reflecting achievement of mastery level of performance	Description reflecting highest level of performance	
<b>Criteria #2</b>	Description reflecting beginning level of performance	Description reflecting movement toward mastery level of performance	Description reflecting achievement of mastery level of performance	Description reflecting highest level of performance	
<b>Criteria #3</b>	Description reflecting beginning level of performance	Description reflecting movement toward mastery level of performance	Description reflecting achievement of mastery level of performance	Description reflecting highest level of performance	
<b>Criteria #4</b>	Description reflecting beginning level of performance	Description reflecting movement toward mastery level of performance	Description reflecting achievement of mastery level of performance	Description reflecting highest level of performance	

Taken from Mertler (2001)

## Appendix B

### Lesson Plan

Objectives: At the end of this activity students will be able to use polite request and indirect questions in the simple present tense by means of reacting to a previously set up role-play. The role-play consist of a scene of two friend sitting at a restaurant, one of them not having enough money for paying for his food.

Level: Elementary

Materials: Prepared scene (it can be selected from a movie or a sitcom), props and people (other teachers, parents, students) to play the roles, analytic rubrics previously elaborated and a copy of the scene script for each group.

Process:

1. Start by putting students in context. Provide the necessary background and vocabulary in relation to the activity (count, non-count nouns; expressions for ordering food; expressions with would, can, could, would you mind; usual things found at a restaurant; etc.). Use the scene as a guide.

2. Deliver the constructed or adapted rubrics to the students. Write on the board and explain in detail all the necessary steps students are to follow for getting through the activity and the process for assessing their classmates with regards to the competences involved.

3. Ask students to get in groups and pay attention to the scene. Make a few questions on the scene to check the students' understanding concerning the scene and the small details it can contain. Groups are then handed a copy of the scene script. The script is studied and the scene is repeated a second time. This will give students more listening practice and ensure comprehension and teachers the chance to have a better idea of the students' skills.

4. After the performance, lead students to reflect inside each group about the performance, the plot of the story, the character to be replaced and how it could be resolved. Here, students need to share opinions and comments on the plot and the situation, analyse the possible outcomes, write the lines for the character that is going to be replaced and anticipate the lines of the other characters as well. Teachers must help and guide students in each group and provide them with ideas and vocabulary when necessary. As an option, students can choose one volunteer per group for the performance and help him or her during the acting part. Also, a new student can take the role of the volunteer when necessary. At this point, teachers can make several notes regarding students' process and the employment of the competences they intend to evaluate.

5. For the acting part, students come to the front and take the role of the replaced character. They should deliver their lines and improvise so that the story is resolved. Here, the teacher and the students should pay special attention to the performance and assess it according to the criteria specified in each rubric which must reflect the three basic components of communicative competence. In addition, some extra criteria can be specified for elements like creativity and the student's problem-solving skills.

6. For the last part, a series of conferences need to be held. Here, students can share their impressions and comments on the activity, discuss their performance and self-assess. Teachers then should communicate the assessment results of their peers, their own assessment results and provide feedback that can set the path for future learning and any necessary changes inside the teaching and learning process. If time is limited, this part can be carried out in the course of a week or two.