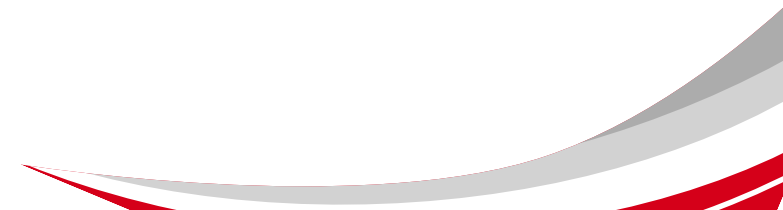


# Role play as a feminist popular education tool

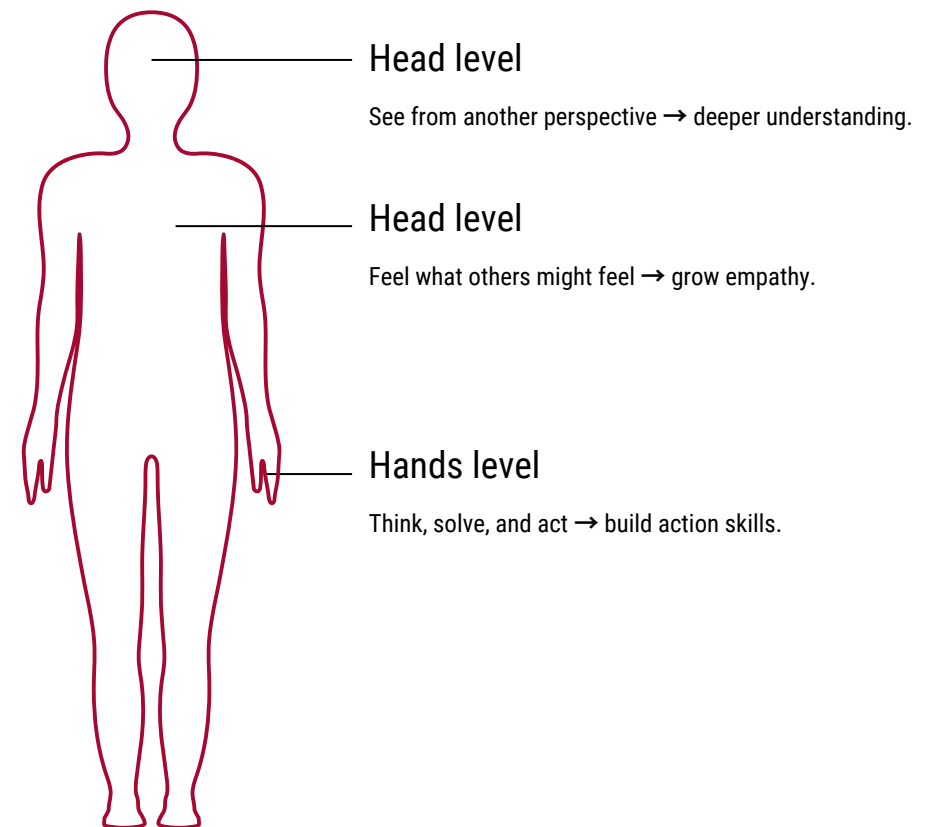


## Why a role play?

Feminist popular education is about actively constructing knowledge through dialogue and reflection. Role plays help you achieve this by exploring the different perspectives, challenges, and assumptions embedded in the issue you are dealing with. With a role play, you can connect to the head, heart and hands. By taking on the role of another person, i.e. role switch, you are better able to analyse a situation.

Being in someone else's shoes, you take a different perspective, creating a more complex understanding of a particular issue or situation (**Head**). By experiencing a situation from another person's perspective, you draw on the emotions you think this person experiences in a situation, and this can foster greater empathy (**Heart**). Being in someone else's shoes, you need to think on your feet, solve issues and communicate, all skills necessary for taking action (**Hands**).

**Role-play engages the head, heart, and hands for deeper analysis of a situation**



## Example of the use of a role play

Women in precarious forms of employment use role play to analyse the challenges they face in claiming their unemployment insurance benefits. This example is from a workshop with Volunteer Food Handlers in the National School Nutrition Programme struggling to access their UIF benefits at the end of their two-year contracts.



### STEP 1: Set up the room

A half-moon-like circle with role play in the middle. Arrange the role play in a way that the characters do not have their backs facing anyone.

### STEP 2: Introduce the purpose of the role play

- A role play is not a performance but an educational and interactive activity where participants act out specific roles or scenarios to explore particular situations, behaviours, or concepts.
- We can tell many stories through one role play.
- You feel like it is a real-life situation.
- It is possible to look at our challenges from outside and from different angles. Seeing an issue with a bit of distance and from different angles helps me identify and understand the possible positive or negative actions I might take.

- The most important thing in this role play is not what we are performing but what we are understanding from the actions we see.
- Different people can join the role-play for one minute at a time, but only to add actions that deepen the analysis. The goal is not to be a great performer but to show how well you understand the character you are role-playing.

### STEP 3: Create the school scenario

Understanding how those with formal power in the school, i.e. the school principal and school coordinator, view and respond to the Volunteer Food Handler's right to the unemployment insurance fund.

#### FACILITATOR 1: Facilitating the role-play engagement

Introduce the scenario, the two key characters, i.e. principal and school coordinator. Introduce the idea that everyone in the room is in the workshop as participants, but will take on the character of food handlers when they engage the school principal and school coordinator.



School scenario: L-R School principal, school coordinator and Volunteer Food Handler

There are three chairs in the middle. Roles: Principal and School Coordinator, and an **empty** chair for the food handler who wants to address the principal and school coordinator.

The principal and school coordinator begin the scene by commenting on the problems of the UIF. The conversation should highlight both positive and challenging attitudes and actions of the school. You could have different scenarios, for example, the coordinator might want to assist, while the principal responds with irritation or resistance:

*Why is the Department of Basic Education giving us this role? Why does DBE not do it themselves? This is extra work, not recognised, and not paid anything extra. Why should Volunteer Food Handlers have UIF when that is only for people who have been employed and they are not employees. Those women (food handlers) are so rude and come to us to tell us what to do, to give orders, but shame, they also need to feed their families.*

Pause. Now the participants have a chance to come sit in the empty chair to comment on what is being said by the principal and coordinator.

Facilitator 1 facilitates this process to make sure that one Volunteer Food Handler at a time comes up and speaks for one minute only.

At this point, the participants are sitting in the semi-circle, both watching but also ready to enter the role play, i.e. occupy the empty seat and speak as a Volunteer Food Handler addressing the principal and school coordinator.

At the end of the role-play, the principal and coordinator step away from their chairs, exit their roles, and rejoin the circle.

#### **STEP 4: Create the Department of Employment and Labour scenario**

An official and receptionist/administrator are discussing the issue of UIF for the Volunteer Food Handler. The role play is to reveal the attitudes and perceptions of officials handling the UIF.

#### **FACILITATOR 2: Facilitating the role play engagement.**

Introduce the scenario, the two key characters, i.e. principal and school coordinator. Introduce the idea that everyone in the room is in the workshop as participants, but will take on the character of food handlers when they engage the school principal and school coordinator.

Use the same set-up as the first role play. You can start with the DOL official on a phone call about assisting Volunteer Food Handlers who want to claim their UIF. This phone conversation can be positive, negative, or both.

Receptionist/administrator could role-play how she responds when encountering food handlers - this can be positive or negative, or a bit of both.

Facilitator 2 then invites the food handlers to step into the role by sitting in the empty chair and speaking directly to the official or receptionist for one minute.

### **STEP 5: Reflection and debriefing**

Everyone is back together in the circle.

- How did you feel being part of the role play?
- What are you seeing or hearing that you did not see or hear before?
- Were there any differences in the responses of those taking on roles with either men or women in positions of power? Please explain
- What would you advise a Volunteer Food Handler who is trying to claim UIF?
- What would you advise a Volunteer Food Handler who has just started her contract?



Department of Employment & Labour scenario: L-R role play facilitator, department receptionist/administrator and Volunteer Food Handler

### **Resource: LRS Facilitation Toolkit**

