Online Discussions: Role Playing Examples

Role-play encourages students to look at an issue from the viewpoint of another. Assign roles based on module outcomes and allow students to respond to questions on the discussion board by answering them as their “character” would.

Principles for creating role-play exercises:

- Be very clear; about what you want people to get out of the role-playing experience. Muddy thinking at the outset will result in muddy outcomes. Clear thinking and role-play preparation result in clear outcomes.
- Are you assessing skills or are you developing them? If you are assessing people, they need to know the competency level expected of them and the brief needs to have measurable outcomes. People also need to trust that the role-play will have the same level of challenge for them and their peers.
- Are you giving everyone the same level of challenge, or are you flexing according to the level of skill demonstrated by each individual?

Required Elements for a Successful Role Playing Exercise

- Clear objectives
- Identify a scenario, context, and roles
- Describe the setting, problem, and roles
- Promote student investigation of their role
- Set clear expectations
- Debriefing/concluding remarks

Example

This example is a slight modification of Theissen’s (n.d.) United States Panel on Climate Change: Greenhouse Role Play Exercise.

**Scenario:** Welcome to the U.S. Convention on Climate Change. Each of you will be serving as a member of an interest group at the upcoming meeting on May 1, 2016. During this meeting, each of you will present your argument, debate with other interest groups, and finally vote on the bill that is being presented.

**The Issue:** All of you have examined evidence for global climate change and have seen scientific data strongly suggesting that humans are involved in the observed warming of the past century, primarily through the ever-increasing use of fossil fuels. There is
growing concern about this issue and a strong global push for action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The most recent international effort was the United Nations Climate Convention at Copenhagen in late 2009. Although the need to prevent dangerous warming was recognized at that meeting, the U.S. and other nations failed to reach any legally-binding agreements. However, the U.S. did pledge to reduce emissions by 17% of 2005 levels by the year 2020, pending Congressional approval. There is a consensus among climate experts that this level of reduction is not aggressive enough to prevent the worst impacts of warming. For this reason, the United States Panel on Climate Change has been asked to consider striving for a more ambitious emissions reduction goal. (Theissen, n.d.)

**The bill:** At the upcoming U.S. Convention on Climate Change your delegation will vote on a bill proposing the following agreement to go before Congress: An agreed-upon reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States by 25% of levels recorded during the year 2005 by the year 2020. This would be achieved through any number of methods, including voluntary reductions, greater use of renewable energy, engineering, and market-based solutions such as cap and trade. You are urged to carefully consider both the economic impact of passing this legislation as well as the potential cost of not acting on this issue. You will need to do some web research to support your position. (Theissen, n.d.)

**Discussion Instructions:**
You will be assigned to role play as a member of one of the following interest groups:
1. U.S. Congressional Subcommittee on Climate Change
2. The Coalition of Concerned Climate Scientists
3. Fossil Fuels for a Strong America
4. The Business Organization
5. REALGREEN Environmental Group
6. The Citizen Advocates of America
7. Save Our Small Island Nations and Coasts
8. The Organization for International Business

Once you are assigned your interest group, read the assigned readings and the description of your interest group. In addition, conduct research on your interest group to find data that supports your position on the proposed bill. After completing the readings, decide on a strategy to best represent your interest group. Play your role to the best of your ability, even if you don’t agree with the interest group.

**Initial Discussion Post:** By Wednesday at 11:59pm, post your strategy. Your strategy should be 400-600 words and include answers to the following:
- Will you propose to accept, amend, or reject the bill?
• Provide at least 3 supported explanations to back up your position.

Response Posts: By Saturday at 11:59pm, challenge the strategy taken by at least 2 other interest groups. In your 200-300 word post, try to persuade your peer to accept your strategy.

Vote on the Bill: By Sunday at 11:59pm vote on the bill by either accepting, amending, or rejecting and offer a concise statement with your vote.

Reference: