

## EDUC 3780

### Part L: Role-Plays, Games, and Simulations

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### Role-Playing, Simulations, and Games

The rapidly changing climate in today's schools has placed many new demands on teachers. Among them is the desire of students to be actively involved in the learning process. Role-playing (sometimes called dramatizing), simulations, and games provide a chance for students to become active participators in their own learning processes. Application of these strategies opens new dimensions for teachers, both in their instruction and in their relationships with students.

Each strategy has its own definition and purpose for the classroom.

1. **Role-playing** is usually unrehearsed and unprepared problem solving in which certain members of a group assume specified roles in a context that is non-threatening. Role-plays tend to have a short time duration. "Role playing provides students with a chance to act out, rather than merely talk about, ways to solve problems effectively" (yale.edu).
2. **Simulations** incorporate a simulated model of a real-world process, including various role-plays accompanying the social situation and are governed by formal game rules and operations. Many simulations for all subject areas are offered through software for computers. As teachers, we need to explore the computer games market for software that encourages critical thinking skills, vocabulary development, reading and writing practice, and retention and application of concepts appropriate to our content areas.
3. **Games** can take many forms, but in the classroom, any activity that involves a competition, social interaction, and some form of prize or award would be considered a game. Classroom game activities are typically not graded, and student participation is based on the desire to contribute to a team or to individually achieve some prize or recognition. Usually games have 'winners.' Ideally, even the 'losers' of the game should feel that the experience was enjoyable" (glossary.plasmalink.com/glossary.html).

Besides understanding the range and dimensions of gaming strategies in education, teachers using role-playing, simulations, and games must be aware of the significance their classroom environment has on the effectiveness of the strategy. Setting the appropriate classroom climate is essential in ensuring that students are comfortable and receptive to the demands these active strategies may make on them. Teachers who are accustomed to autocratic rule and rigid control of curriculum and class conduct may find it difficult to convert their teaching styles to complement the 'play' perspective needed in these strategies. Not every teacher will be comfortable with the use of games as educational tools nor able to successfully engage the students in the kind of play necessary for learning to take place.

Certain characteristics of the classroom environment need to be established before the teacher can expect to use role-playing, simulations, and games successfully. Students need to know and feel that:

1. It is safe to explore, to take risks, and to discover the implications of choice without being penalized for 'wrong' answers or 'perfect' solutions.
2. It is permissible for strong feelings to emerge and be expressed during a role-play or simulated experience.
3. It is important to respect each other's ideas and to support individual interpretations and feelings.
4. It is essential to process the game play afterward in order to gain insights into the behaviors enacted and the decisions made.

Establishing such a climate cannot be done at the spur of the moment. A certain degree of trust between the teacher and the students must develop in order for the students to risk new roles or participate actively in simulations. . If teachers do not take the time nor effort to create conditions appropriate for this strategy, they will find that these strategies will not be as fruitful an experience as he had hoped.

## What is Role-Playing?

Role-playing is a kind of “reality practice.” It enables groups to relive critical incidents, to explore what happened in them, and to consider what might have happened if different choices had been made in the effort to resolve the problem.

A common assumption held by teachers is that learning to lead role-playing consists of following a set of directions. More than that is involved to do it well. Skills in leading role-playing require:

1. understanding the process is a group problem-solving procedure based upon spontaneity, exploration or alternative solutions to problems, and consideration of the likely consequences.
2. skill in using non-directive responses and questioning techniques; learning how to ask open-ended questions that sustain students’ thinking and are non-judgmental.
3. establishing a climate of trust by demonstrating, as the teacher, that you are listening, protecting students’ ideas, giving opportunity for all viewpoints to be aired, and shutting down invasions of privacy.
4. practice; there is no substitute for learning in action in order to discover your own hidden agendas, to learn how long to run and enactment, and to learn how to facilitate the thinking of your students.
5. willingness to learn by making mistakes; most teachers; insights into the role-playing process will come from analyzing their own behavior during role-playing sessions.

## Suggestions for Leading Role-Plays

1. Setting the climate for role-playing
  - key to realistic role-playing
  - leader must demonstrate through own behavior that many problems are not easy to solve; there is no one “right” solution
  - guides group to discovery; open-ended exploration
  - try to maintain enthusiasm and interest
2. Selecting role players
  - after a warm-up and presentation of the situation or problem
- asking questions such as “What is \_\_\_\_\_ like?” “What is our situation/ problem?” “How does \_\_\_\_\_ feel?” “What will happen now?”

- responses will help to identify those students who understand the situation—these are the ones most likely to be ready for role-play
  - select those who might be more impulsive or select socially poor solutions so that more ideas can be explored
3. Preparing the audience to be participant observers
    - should observe purposefully
    - think about the roles and ask themselves would they play them the same way
    - check the performance for realism
    - gauge the feelings of the actors who are confronting the situation
    - think through the solution and consider other solutions
  4. The enactment
    - helps the role-players get into the action ask stage-setting questions such as “Where will this take place?” “What time of day is it?” “Where in the story are we starting?” “What are the various people doing?”
    - does not need to go to completion, but can be played out—depends on what is being accomplished
    - lets students demonstrate their ideas
  5. Discussing and evaluating
    - leader should not be judgmental and thank the participants
    - ask open-ended questions “What is happening here?” “How does \_\_\_\_\_ feel?” “Could this happen?” “What will happen now?” “Why does \_\_\_\_\_ behave the way he/she does?”
  6. The re-enactment
    - represents other persons’ ideas
    - involves more exploration of the situation
    - provides alternative solutions
  7. Sharing experiences and generalizing
    - leader’s question “Where are we now?” or “Is this a true life situation?”
    - explore and/or review some of the various solutions

Source: Handout provided by Patricia M. Taylor in a WSU master’s class (1992).

## The Role of the Teacher in Gaming Strategies

Much like cooperative learning, educational games alter the traditional function of teachers. In order to make the necessary adjustments in their classroom roles, teachers first have to believe in the power of gaming strategies to potentially assist students' growth in language and concept development. Teachers cannot simply use such activities as "time-fillers" or else the potential of the game as a learning device will be lost.

Teachers should form their objectives first in order to choose, design, or modify a game which meets the needs of the class. Some of the purposes of gaming and role-playing might include:

1. spontaneity training: no set roles are established; uninhibited exploration is encouraged.
2. skills training: a needed behavior is practiced; a skill is rehearsed or acquired (interviewing a person. working on decision-by-consensus, etc.)
3. sensitivity training: feelings of here and now are discussed; consequences of feelings explored.
4. problem-solving: focus on both feelings and alternatives; open-ended questions and re-enactments.
5. subject matter: content is reviewed or new concepts introduced.

Once the purposes for the strategy have been decided, decisions about where in the course design such a strategy will prove most effective must take place. Should the role-play or game be used to introduce a unit of study, to serve as a pre-assessment, to evolve students in mid-course, or to help students review before a final test? Accurate perceptions of the strategy's potential to motivate and to teach should help guide the teacher in these decisions.

However, teachers may choose a gaming strategy to support a specific course goal only to find that in the play of the game, students learn concepts and acquire information other than what the teacher thought the game illustrated. Flexibility is necessary in allowing the game and the players to take additional turns than the ones expected. Teachers must be careful not to dictate, control, or limit the game's potential for growth in areas other than those planned for.

Much of the time, gaming strategies influence the affective as well as the cognitive domain. Teachers using these strategies should value affective growth as much as cognitive development in order to properly assess the learning produced in terms of attitude change, self-confidence, openness to others, and acceptance of different view points.

Switching the teacher's role from judge to game coach and coordinator requires the following responsibilities from the teacher:

1. Teachers must be as thoroughly familiar with the game as possible before using it; they should play the game beforehand, witness a trial run, or walk through the game rules, directions, and materials ahead of time. Being well-organized and properly prepared with all materials and instructions greatly facilitates game operation.
2. Teachers must decide whether they will enter the game themselves as a player or remain outside the game as an observer or facilitator. Although this is a matter of personal preference, some games lend themselves to teacher participation better than others. However, when teachers do enter play of a game, they definitely lessen the traditional distance between themselves and their students.
3. Teachers should be careful to keep the play voluntary; those who choose not to play in a game can benefit from observation and can share their 'outside' perceptions with the players.
4. Teachers must allow adequate time for post-game discussion and processing. **The significance of the post-game critiquing/processing cannot be over-emphasized.** The value of a game is seriously diminished without it and considerably enhanced by it. In creating appropriate post-game questions, consider the many avenues processing the game or role-play can take:
  - a. Players may analyze their own actions and feelings, offer rationales for their decisions, and discover the reasons behind other players' decisions or moves.
  - b. Players may question the validity of the model, the complexity of play, and may offer suggestions on how to re-organize play for smoother operation.
  - c. Players may compare the game's concepts to similar concepts with which they are familiar.
  - d. Players may discover and analyze what information or skills they still need in order to play the game successfully or pass a test on the content material.

Throughout the discussion, the teacher should resist the temptation to seek right or wrong answers or to judge and grade a student based on his game behavior.
5. Teachers must be willing to engage in the creative activity of writing and designing games. The creation and supervision of gaming strategies is challenging, yet very rewarding. Such activities release and engage the energies of the students.

## Energizers

Although not technically educational games, energizers do have their place in the secondary classroom. With many high schools going to “block” schedules, it is unlikely that teachers can maintain students’ attentions for a full 90 minutes. Energizers provide a quick chance for students to “get moving” physically so that their mental states are more ready to learn.

Other reasons to use energizers are:

1. Everyone can play and the rules are simple.
2. They help a group
  - get acquainted.
  - spark discussion.
  - change the pace.
  - bring closure to a group activity.

Emphasis is on

- spontaneity.
- community-building.
- fun.
- cooperation and respect
- innovation and adaptation.

Keys to leading energizers.

- Discuss the purpose of cooperative activities/energizer.
- Use them to make a point or introduce a new concept.
- Be a player yourself.
- Stress safety.
- Be sensitive to individual and cultural differences.
- Use games to increase players’ awareness of different cultures.
- Adapt activities to meet special needs.
- Keep the game moving at a snappy pace.
- Talk about (debrief/process) the game when it is over.

*from Energize! Energizers and Other Great Cooperative Activities for All Ages,*  
Carol Apacki, 1991



## REFERENCES

<http://glossary.plasmalink.com/glossary.html>

## HELPFUL WEB SITES

### Role-Playing

1. <http://www.yale.edu/peace/role-play.htm>
2. [http://www.csd.uwa.edu.au/altmodes/to\\_delivery/role\\_plays.html](http://www.csd.uwa.edu.au/altmodes/to_delivery/role_plays.html)

### Simulations

1. <http://www.highsmith.com>

### Instructional Games

1. <http://www.med.ufl.edu/mdtp/resources/InstructionalGamesGeneral.htm>
2. <http://www.thiagi.com/fac-002.html>