Online Role Play

What is it?   Why use it?

Example: **Buyat Bay**

Example: **Middle East Politics**

How do I do it?

(Based on work done under ALTC Grant "Project EnRoLE")

Online Role Play (cont.)

Online role play ...

- is a very effective/engaging teaching technique

- embodies experiential learning in a pure form

- is applicable in a wide range of contexts/disciplines

- extends naturally for cross-disciplinary use

Role play *designs*:

- are *not* expensive to set up and run

- can be re-used, and can be adapted to other contexts

Online Role Play (cont.)

Comments from students about online role play:

- *[The best thing was] its utter capacity to enthrall.*

- *It was an incredibly organic, 'natural' way to learn. The insight gained would not have been possible in a straight, text-based course.*

- *I was thoroughly impressed with the way it taught me skills of negotiation, compromise and diplomacy. ... I could by the end talk with fluency about people, places and events in the Middle East.*

- *There was no avoiding 'learning'. You HAD to absorb things and research other players to get on.*

- *It is absolutely great. I have learned more/ retained more/ want to learn more/ am no longer afraid of computers/ can actually name most of my class mates and have had a lot of fun doing it. − P.S. Great for dinner conversation.*

- *Offered a psychologically accurate analogy for the exercise of power interests/ failure of strategic aims. [A] highly organic integrated learning process.*

- *An essay doesn't change whereas the questions we needed to answer fluctuated daily.*

- *It's the most brilliant teaching method I've ever come across.*

Online Role Play (cont.)

Online role plays as defined by Project EnRoLE:

- aim to increase understanding of human interaction, social dynamics, systems involving human activity, …

- participants *assume a role* in someone else's shoes

- carry out *authentic tasks* in an *authentic context*

- involve substantial *in-role* human *interaction*

- interaction between roles is *substantially online*

- *assessable* learning outcomes, opportunites for *reflection*

Online Role Play (cont.)

The *process* of online role play:

- establish learning objectives

- devise relevant roles and scenarios

- allow *students* to "inhabit" *roles*

- kick-start role-play with *initial scenario*

- allow students to *interact* in role

- *monitor* (perhaps direct by injecting new material)

- finish off with debriefing/reflection

Buyat Bay Role Play

Presented by Alison Rutherford ...

Middle East Politics Role Play

Goal: understand complexities of politics (in middle-east)

Aims:

- explore facets such as ...

  - power and its limits, media/stereotypes

  - basis for extreme political movements

- develop teamwork and negotiation skills

Context: political science courses   (years 2/3, PG)

Note: we have called it a "simulation" (MEPS) but it is really a role-play.

Middle East Politics Role Play (cont.)

How the Middle East role plays run:

- lecturer(s) determine scenario, roles, timing

- students select/allocated-to roles

- role-teams research role and post role profile

- scenario released and interaction begins

- tutors (controllers) monitor role play activity

- rules: no killing, military action must be cleared

- ends with a live teleconference   (student-run)

Sample: August 2009 role play

If you want to explore the system, ask me for a URL and username.

Middle East Politics Role Play (cont.)

Some facts about the Middle East role plays:

- developed in conjunction with Dr. Andrew Vincent

- run every year since 1990   (typically both semesters)

- Melb Uni, Macquarie, Deakin, CSU, UNSW, UoW, UTS, ...

- UTexas Austin, Georgetown, AU Cairo, Canterbury, ...

- Sydney high schools (Nth.Sydney Boys, Killara, ...)

- 20-100+ roles   (typically 30-40, depends on class sizes)

- roles include politicians, intelligence, media, ...

- each role played by a team of 2-3 students

- typically runs for 2-3 weeks

Doing Online Role Play

Online role play process:

1. establish learning outcomes   *(hours)*

2. develop scenario, roles, overall "flow"   *(hours)*

3. associate students with roles   *(hours-days)*

4. start role play by releasing initial scenario

5. monitor/control student role play activity   *(hours-weeks)*

6. debriefing and reflection (out of role)   *(hours)*

7. assessment, evaluation   *(hours-days)*

Doing Online Role Play (cont.)

Online environment needs to provide:

- email, forum, chat, publishing, groups, access control

Ideally, environment should be highly *immersive*.

Can be realised (in increasing order of immersiveness):

- within standard LMSs (e.g. Moodle, Blackboard)

- via custom applications (e.g. Fablusi, MEPS, ORE)

- via virtual worlds? (e.g. Second Life)