

## INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



### Teaching Technique 23

# Role Play

#### ACTIVITY TYPE

- Group Work
- Reciprocal Teaching
- Presentation
- Learning Assessment

#### TEACHING PROBLEM ADDRESSED

- Lack of Participation
- Low Motivation/Engagement
- Surface Learning

#### LEARNING TAXONOMIC LEVEL

- Application: Creative Thinking
- Application: Problem Solving
- Caring
- Human Dimension
- Integration & Synthesis

# Role Play

A *Role Play* is a created situation in which students deliberately act out or assume characters or identities they would not normally assume.

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- 1 Clarify your teaching purpose and learning goals for the *Role Play*
  - 2 Design the *Role Play* scenario
  - 3 Identify resources (if any) for each role
  - 4 Develop a plan for learning assessment or grading
  - 5 Create and distribute an assignment handout
  - 6 Provide students time to plan, practice, and enact the *Role Play*
  - 7 Reflect upon the *Role Play* activity and evaluate its effectiveness

# Step-By-Step Instructions

In this section we provide you with guidance on each of the seven steps involved as you consider this technique.

## **STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS**

A *Role Play* provides an action environment for students to experience the emotional and intellectual responses of an assumed identity or imagined circumstance. At its essence, *Role Play* is an example of “learning by doing.” The word “role” indicates that students must actively apply knowledge, skills, and understanding to successfully speak and act from a different, assigned perspective. This challenges them to think creatively about how other people would feel, think, and respond to a given situation. The term “play” indicates that students use their imaginations and have fun, acting out their parts in a non-threatening environment.

*Role Plays* engage students in a creative, participatory, and collaborative activity that requires them to apply course concepts as they assume fictional identities or envision themselves in unfamiliar situations. By so doing, students often can learn to care more about what they are learning as they also learn more deeply about the personal and social implications of what they are learning. *Role Plays* can therefore be used to address a wide range of teaching goals and learning outcomes, and it is important to think through what you want to accomplish by using them in your course.

## **STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK’S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT**

It is critical to spend thoughtful time designing the scenario for your *Role Play*. Appropriate scenarios require interaction from stakeholders with multiple perspectives. Therefore, identify the perspectives and define the type and number of characters and the framework for their actions. In addition to the roles for persons who are participating in the action, consider assigning group process roles such as ‘moderator’ (who can, for example, intervene if a person is falling out of character) or ‘observer(s)’ (who interpret and comment on the action). When crafting the basic story line, it is best to initiate the action through a critical event that the players must respond to, such as a comment by one of the actors or an incident that has just occurred.

## **STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS**

- Identify resources (if any) for each of the playing roles and decide how the activity will end. For example, will you set a time limit, or will you let the scenario end naturally?
- Determine how much time you will allow for students to discuss the problem situation.
- Assign or ask students to assume a stakeholder role. If assigning group process roles such as ‘moderator’ or ‘observer,’ make sure students are clear on their tasks.

# Step-By-Step Instructions (CON'T)

- Inform students of the time limit or other parameters that will signify the end of the activity.
- It is probably best to create a handout that includes the problem situation that forms the basis of the *role play* as well as other pertinent information regarding logistics and assessment.

## **STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING**

If you choose to assess and grade the *Role Plays*, the *Learning Artifact* is your record of it. You can choose to video the performance, or ask students to do it, or you can simply assess the performance in progress with a checklist or rubric. The data you gather during the play itself is a measure of student understanding of how humans can or should interact. *Role Plays* typically are used at the end of a module of content to check for understanding. It is possible, however, to do a *Role Play* as a pre and post assessment of student understanding.

## **STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS**

Distribute your handout. It is important to allow sufficient time for students to ask questions on any aspects of the scenario that are unclear.

## **STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE**

- Ask students to form groups with enough members in each group to assume each role.
- Instruct students to enact the *role play*. The *role play* should run only until the proposed behavior is clear, the targeted characteristic has been developed, or the skill has been practiced.
- Follow the *role play* with a discussion within the small groups and/or with the whole class. Discussion should focus on the students' interpretations of the roles and the motivations for and consequences of their actions.
- Consider asking students to re-enact the *role play*, changing characters or redefining the scenario and then holding another discussion.

## **STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS**

Consider what worked. Consider what could have been better and why and how. Consider whether the *Role Play* is something you would like to use in the future. Record your responses so that you can revisit them, when you are deciding whether or not to implement the activity in the future.

# Support Materials

The materials in this section are intended to help you with the process of implementing this technique. For *Role Play*, we provide examples of different ways to vary and extend this technique as well as a sample assessment rubric.

## WAYS TO VARY AND EXTEND ROLE PLAY

- Allow students to help determine the scenario, identify the major stakeholders, and create the roles.
- After practicing, have student groups perform the role play in front of the class. Or, instead of having multiple groups participating in multiple role plays, consider having one group role play in front of the rest of the class. Assign observers specific tasks for interpreting the action and dialogue of the role play.
- Have one group perform the role play while another group watches, and then have the groups trade places.
- Use *Role Play* to help students develop speaking and listening skills in a technique called “Triad Listening” (Luotto & Stoll, 1996). Groups of three students take turns performing specific roles (Speaker, Reflective Listener, and Referee).
  - › **Speakers** talk first, trying to state their ideas as concisely as possible and then amplifying and clarifying the idea with an example.
  - › **Reflective Listeners** say back to the Speakers what the Speaker has said, but in their own words. Reflective Listeners try to be as thorough and accurate as possible. They try to avoid simply repeating the same words, but instead use their creativity to capture the essence of what the Speaker has said.
  - › **Referees** make sure that group members stick to the rules. If the Referee (or the Speaker) feels that the Reflective Listener’s summary is inaccurate, the Referee interrupts and helps clear up the misunderstanding.

## ROLE PLAY ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

Table adapted from Role Play Assessment Rubric, provided by the  
National Science Teachers Association ([www.nsta.org](http://www.nsta.org))

	4	3	2	1
<b>Preparedness</b>	Student is extremely familiar with all aspects of their role.	Student is familiar with most aspects of their role.	Student is familiar with some aspects of their role.	Student is not familiar with their role.
<b>Participation</b>	Student actively participates, speaking multiple times, adding new information/ evidence each time.	Student actively participates, speaking more than once and adding new information/ evidence each time.	Student actively participates, speaking more than once, but not adding new information/ evidence each time.	Student does not participate in scenario.
<b>Active Listening/ Response</b>	Student demonstrates active listening skills by providing thoughtful responses addressing specific aspects of other students' statements, including asking questions.	Student demonstrates active listening skills by providing thoughtful responses to other students' statements, but asks few or no questions.	Student demonstrates active listening skills by listening attentively while other students speak, but provides little or no response to any statements.	Student provides no indication they are listening to other students, by speaking while others speak, or repeating what others have already stated.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Total Points \_\_\_\_\_ /12 (Potential)

# Technique Template

Following are two templates to assist you as you think through how you might implement this technique in your own class. The first is a completed template, providing an example of how Elizabeth Barkley adapted *Role Play* in her course, *Music of Multicultural America*.

The second is a blank template for you to fill out to tailor this technique for your course.

# Technique Template

Sample *Role Play* Completed Technique Template:

Content from Elizabeth Barkley

*Music of Multicultural America*

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Course Name

## **COURSE CHARACTERISTICS**

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

*My course is an on campus, Honors Institute section of a lower division General Education course. The course meets my institution's United States Cultures & Communities requirement and also the Humanities requirement. It enrolls about 25-30 students. A significant number are international students and we are also trying to recruit more first generation students. As Honors students, they typically have good academic skills and are highly motivated.*

## **STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS**

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

*I am looking for an activity that will help students better understand issues related to immigration. I am especially interested in helping them build empathy for refugees and immigrants.*

## **STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT**

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

*I will have students participate in a role play exercise I found online that focuses on immigration. It involves asking students to role play from a script in which they argue about immigration and make a number of false and questionable claims along the way. I will ask observing students to make a list of statements made in the role play that could be verified or refuted by facts. After the role play, I will distribute a Facts About Immigration handout and we will have a whole class discussion.*

## **STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS**

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?

*I will print out the scripts for the two plays as well as the fact sheet. Then in class, I will ask for volunteers to role play the different parts. We will then have a whole class discussion in conjunction with a fact sheet that I will distribute.*

#### **STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING**

If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

*I want to use this technique as a means for having students explore sensitive issues regarding immigration in a safe environment. For this reason, I am not going to assess and grade it.*

#### **STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS**

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?

*I will simply describe the role play to the class as a whole, so I don't need to create a handout to communicate this assignment to all of the students. However, I will create the fact sheet handout for all students.*

## **STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE**

How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

*I need to copy the role play scripts for the students who are enacting it, and to create the fact sheet handout for the whole class. When I am giving instructions, I need to be careful to emphasize that the students involved in the role play will be stating opinions that may not be their own.*

## **STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS**

*Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.*

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

*(Note: I have not yet implemented this technique in class, so am unable at this point to comment on the activity's effectiveness.)*

# Technique Template

This template is intended for use when planning to implement **Role Play** in your class. Fill in the blanks below, and use the information provided elsewhere in the Instructor's Guide to assist you in your thinking.

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**Course Name**

## **COURSE CHARACTERISTICS**

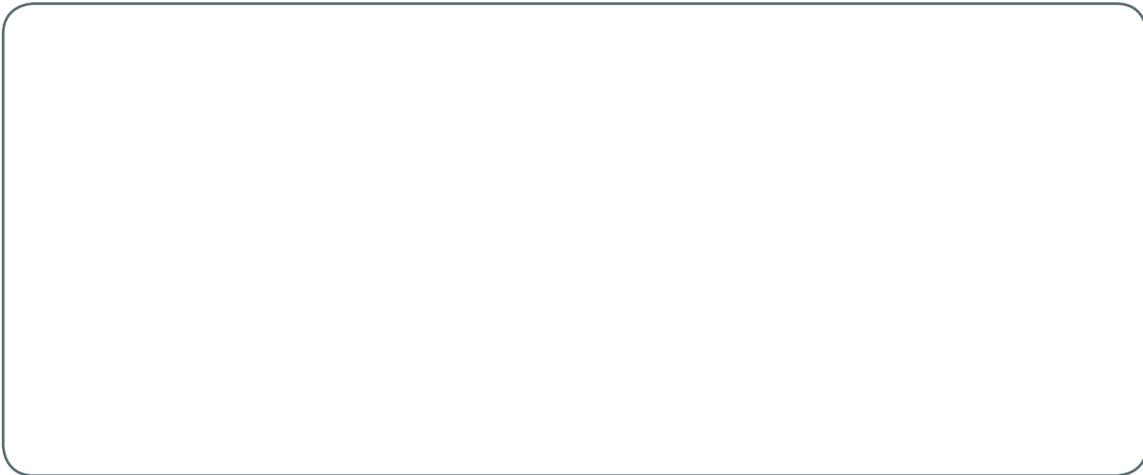
What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

## **STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS**

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

## **STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT**

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?



## **STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS**

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?



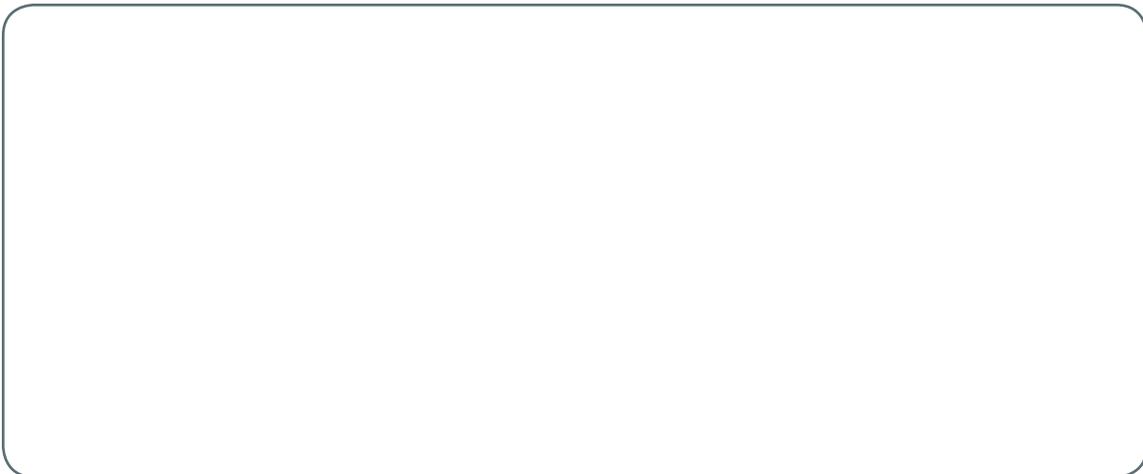
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If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?



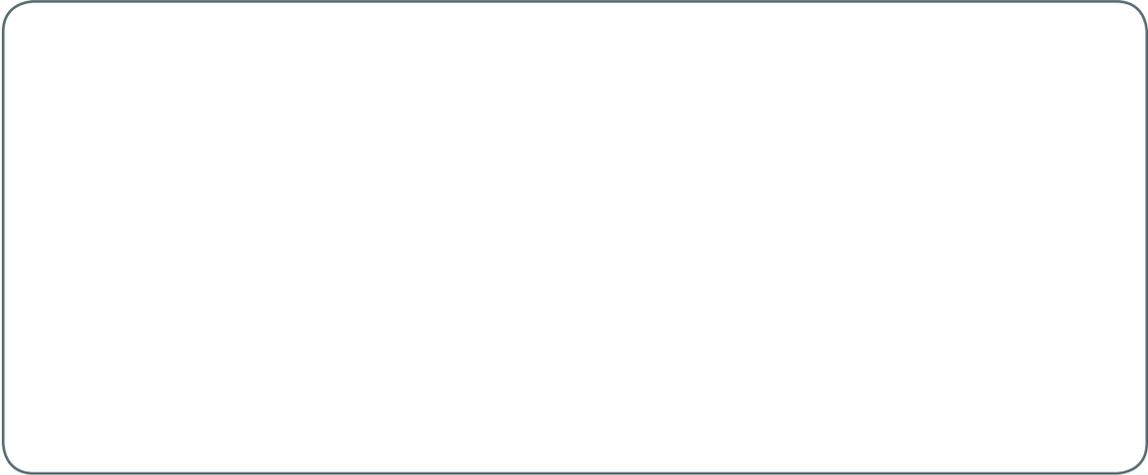
#### **STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS**

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?



## **STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE**

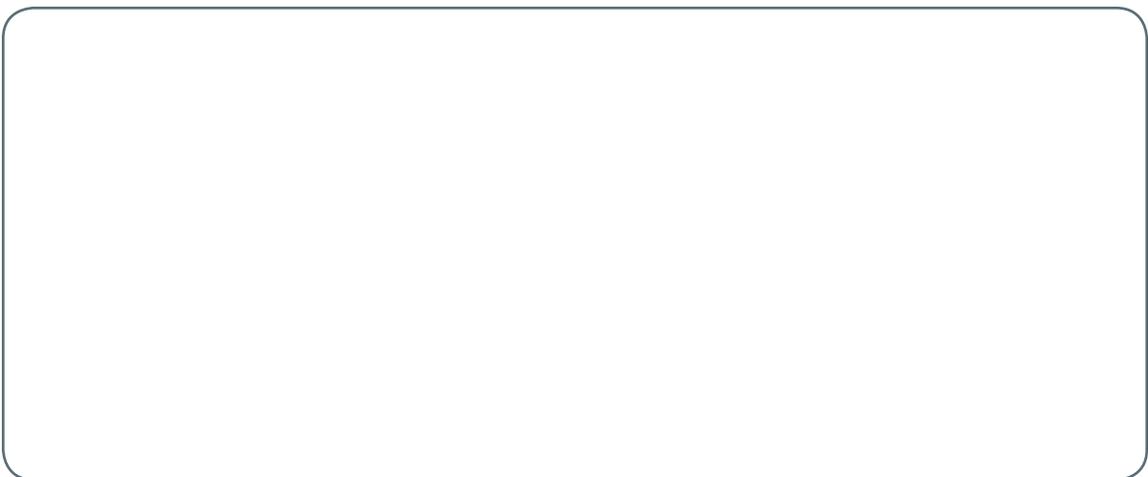
How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?



## **STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS**

*Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.*

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?



# References and Resources

## PRIMARY SOURCE

Content for this download was drawn primarily from “Collaborative Learning Technique 10: Role Play.” Barkley, E. F., Major, C. H., Cross, K.P., (2014). *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, pp. 206–211. It includes material that was adapted or reproduced with permission. For further information about this technique, including examples in online and on campus courses, see the primary source:

Barkley, E. F., Major, C. H., Cross, K.P., (2014). *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. 2nd Ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

## CITATIONS AND ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- McClure, L. (2017). Role Play: Immigration Fiction and Fact. Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility. Retrieved November 23, 2018 from <https://www.morningsidecenter.org/teachable-moment/lessons/roleplay-immigration-fiction-and-fact>
- Naidu, S; Ip, A; Linser, R. (2000). Dynamic goal-based role-play simulation the Web: A case study. *Educational Technology & Society* 3(3) pp190–202.
- Plous, S. (2000). Responding to overt displays of prejudice: A role-playing exercise. *Teaching of Psychology* 27 (3): 198–200.

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