Strategy
Role Play

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How Role Play Works in a Traditional Ground-based Class Setting

Role play can be an effective tool to help students learn to think critically within and across various perspectives (Ritchhart et al., 2011). In on-ground instruction, this approach to student engage-ment relies heavily on the real-time back-and-forth between players. Accompanying social dynamics can be immediately leveraged to further the learning objectives. The process is as follows:

1. Instructor introduces topic of study;
2. Students are introduced to role play activity with a handout (includes ground rules, roles, and guiding questions);
3. Every student signs up for one role from a provided list of personages;
4. Personage groups are created and students meet with peers out of class to discuss and practice;
5. On the day of the role play, the instructor calls on students to speak as their personages in response to pre-distributed questions followed by a whole class discussion.

How Role Play Can Work in a Synchronous Hybrid Setting When Students Are in the Classroom and Videoconferencing

In synchronous hybrid settings, the pedagogical goals and general structure can remain unchanged, but the facilitation may vary.

- Option 1: Keep structure, but ensure technology is functioning. Streaming those joining by video conference on a large screen can help with visual participation. Students streaming in may be encouraged to put comments and questions in the chat, or use one whole class google document for real-time student comments prior to whole group verbal commentary.
- Option 2: Shift from one whole group observation of individual or partner role play to pre-defined, small groups according to role. For example, students are assigned groups according to mode of participation: physical class groups and virtual class groups. Those joining the class session via video conference can be placed in small break out rooms if possible. Allow time for whole class debrief and discussion if using this option.

How Role Play Can Work Asynchronously

Asynchronous role play requires managing student submission and response schedules and utilizing collaboration tools within the LMS or tools like VoiceThread or FlipGrid. These tools can provide manageable ways to facilitate substantive conversations within and across different time frames and zones. A parallel method for facilitating role play asynchronously with relevant variations is as follows:

1. Instructor introduces a topic of study in a designated place within the learning management system (LMS).
2. Instructor introduces students to the role play activity with a video explanation and handout (includes ground rules, roles, and guiding questions).
3. Every student signs up for one role from a provided list of personages.
4. Personage groups are created and students

with the same role meet to discuss and practice. This can be accomplished utilizing the LMS discussion board or technologies like FlipGrid or VoiceThread, both of which embed within most LMS.

5. On the day of the role play activity, the instructor creates heterogeneous role play discussion groups in the LMS or makes slides in VoiceThread that students will use to comment on a particular role play personage. One slide for each group.

6. Within a determined time frame, students interface with VoiceThread recording their role play and respond to comments and questions from their peers.

7. A whole class discussion is then facilitated using the LMS discussion board with defined times for submission.

Recommendations

Role play is often more effective when students are given a short time to meet with others who share the same personage to confer and support prior to performing their part with heterogeneous personage groups. This is particularly true in face-to-face and synchronous hybrid settings and helps reduce anxieties associated with public performance. Breakout rooms are an effective tool for those joining through video conference. Furthermore, in such classroom settings, it is important that those students physically in-class have access to a computer so that role playing groups can easily engage with those students joining via video conference. One challenge is that the room can get very loud, which poses a significant problem for auditory understanding. If possible, it is recommended that the instructor assign roles according to like modes of attendance so as to address the auditory challenges. Finally, have students submit a short written or video record that captures their reflection on the activity and its purpose to explicitly connect the assessment with the learning objectives.

References

Lowe, D. (2020). Improving Breakout Room Discussions in Online Teaching by Using Collaborative Documents. *Faculty Focus*. Retrieved from https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/improving-breakout-room-discussions-in-online-teaching-by-using-collaborative-documents/

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