University of Wollongong
Research Online

Faculty of Education - Papers (Archive)

Faculty of Social Sciences

2007

Reuse of a role play for new university teachers

Sarah Lambert
University of Wollongong, slambert@uow.edu.au

David Macdonald
davidmcd@uow.edu.au

Publication Details

Lambert, S. & Macdonald, D. (2007). Reuse of a role play for new university teachers. ICT: Providing choices for learners and learning. Proceedings ascilite Singapore 2007 (pp. 540-543). Singapore: Centre for Educational Development, Nanyang Technological University.

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

Reuse of a role play for new university teachers

Sarah Lambert and David Macdonald
Centre for Educational Development and Interactive Resources
University of Wollongong

In a paper presented at the 2006 ascilite conference it was stated that thirty six online role-plays were identified in Australian universities, of which 80% were reuse of a Learning Design (Wills & McDougall, 2006). Migrating a proven learning design is not always a simple process (Devonshire, 2006) but as this paper, addressing the conference theme of on-line role play, demonstrates it can be achieved effectively. From a pedagogical perspective, one of the main challenges is associated with the task of realigning the activity to adequately reflect the new context, delivery mode, target audience, learning process and anticipated outcomes (Devonshire, 2006). This paper addresses the reuse issues by looking at one role-play that has been reused to achieve new outcomes.

Keywords: role-based learning, academic staff development, re-usable learning designs

Background

A week-long course for new university teachers at the University of Wollongong (UoW) has had an online role-play for a number of years. The new teachers were given a scenario involving a University marking scandal that hit the headlines of a local newspaper, and allocated a role to respond anonymously to the scenario via a series of 'letters to the editor'. The discussion tool in WebCT was used for the online role-play, which was done in the two weeks following the face-to-face course "Introduction to Tertiary Teaching" (ITT). It aimed at familiarising new teachers with assessment issues and was focussed around norm-based vs criterion-based assessment practice (Bell: 2001). See Figure 1 for a diagram of the learning tasks, resources and supports.

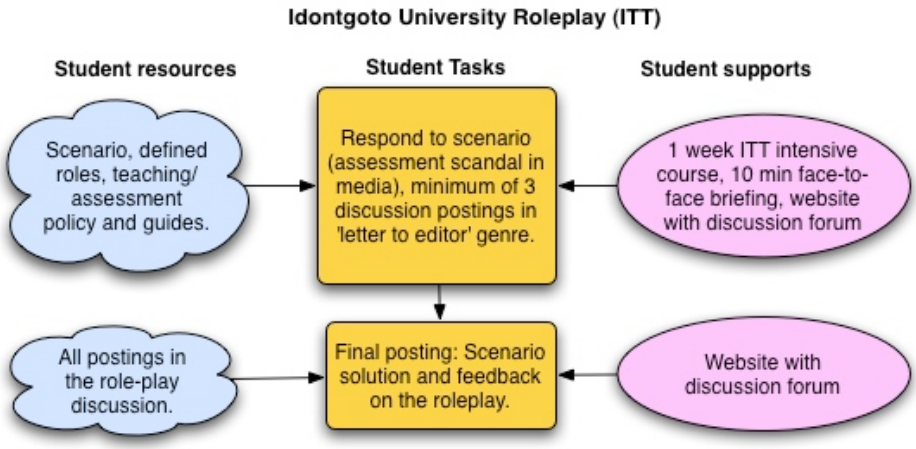

Figure 1: Learning design model (tasks, resources, supports) of the ITT role-play

As part of an internal review of the ITT course and its subsequent evolution into "University Learning and Teaching" or ULT course, the role-play was allocated to the Learning Design Unit for management and facilitation in June 2007. It was modified and delivered by Learning Designers in July 2007.

Meetings were held with the previous facilitator and the ULT co-ordinator to discuss what was required of it in the new ULT course and to gather feedback on the role-play experience so far. The discussion focussed on the two most recent role play delivery sessions, during which facilitation changed from the original designer to another staff member.

The role-play had varying levels of student interaction and engagement during this period. There had on occasions been some technical difficulties resulting in late enrolment of some teachers into the website which effected their participation in the role-play. Some participants engaged enthusiastically with the issues, others did the minimum requirements. Most role-plays were allocated a two week timeframe but

the last two times it was run, deadlines were not met by a high proportion of participants and additional follow up emails were typically required to get them through, taking about an additional two weeks. The facilitator of the most recent two role-plays said time issues had constrained her involvement in the role play and felt that as a result students were not as motivated and engaged as earlier cohorts.

The co-ordinator was keen to avoid a situation such that the role-play was onerous or stressful in terms of participants' time – the face-to-face component of the ULT course was already quite rigorous. On the other hand there is never enough time to dig deeply into teaching policy and guidelines issues and the online role-play had been an opportunity to pick up and progress these conversations and issues raised in the face-to-face classroom. The co-ordinator and development team were keen to have a role-play that gave participants an opportunity to deepen and extend their knowledge, as well as to experience eTeaching using the Learner Management System in use at UoW. In this way we aimed to model good eTeaching practice. The team was also keen to avoid any perception that the role-play was a simple or perfunctory 'hurdle' task to pass the compulsory unit. In addition, we wanted to see if we could increase the 'momentum' in the role-play such that the energy and depth of discussion encouraged high levels of participation by a greater percentage of participants as we felt that this might lead to meeting the assessment requirements within the two week timeframe.

Learning Outcomes were discussed and clarified in discussion with the ULT co-ordinators. The learning designers also used the "Checklist for Teachers Selecting an Existing Role Play" found on the AUTC project website (Ip & Wills, 2002). The aim of the role-play review and redesign was to broaden its scope and include a range of assessment issues. High levels of engagement and deep learning outcomes were explicitly sought. Learning outcomes included familiarisation with the *Teaching and Learning Code of Practice* and *the Good Practice Assessment Guidelines* as well as a secondary outcome of developing the use of online teaching technologies.

Modifications to the existing role-play

The first modification was to rewrite the scenario by removing the newspaper scandal starting point and therefore the requirement to write in the 'letter to the editor' genre. We felt that if the participants could respond directly to the scenario in the 'voice' of their character without having to worry about writing something as formal as a letter to the editor, it might lead to getting a good number of responses quickly, leading to high levels of interaction in the discussion space. It was felt that this might also encourage more 'conversational' comments to enrich the discussion and take it in directions that the participants themselves might be concerned or interested in. The scenario was changed to be lunchtime conversation at an annual conference – a situation where people can talk candidly and informally about their issues and concerns. Additional stimulus scenarios were also written (one concerning plagiarism, and one concerning improper use of discussion boards/IT facilities.) The additional stimulus could be introduced during the discussion after the first few days by the moderators posing as a participant. The idea was for the moderators to use these to extend the participants if they seemed keen to engage – to give them something to get their teeth into or if the initial scenario had run its course. It was also envisaged that the moderators could respond to any assessment related issues that might be raised during the role-play.

As before, all roles, including the moderators' roles, were anonymous, the moderators had two distinct roles one as a Keynote Speaker and one as an international tutor. The roles were also changed from the initial role-play – there had been quite a number of 'executive' type roles e.g. Deans, Heads, CEOs of satellite campuses, Vice Chancellor, Pro Vice Chancellor etc . These executive roles were reduced to three (a Head of Department, Dean of Students, and a Professor), leaving the majority to be roles with major teaching responsibilities, lecturers (3), tutors (2). We introduced two students into the mix to broaden perspectives, and removed all reference to characters at different physical locations. In the earlier versions a system of satellite campuses at Wollongong was replicated creating a series of fictional locations with a fictional university called "Idontgoto University". During the review it was identified that awareness of multi-location teaching issues was not one of the learning outcomes and thus this complexity was removed. The name of the role-play changed to "University Conference" and the characters were presumed to come from a range of universities.

We kept the pre-reading and emphasis on engaging with the Teaching and Learning Code of Practice and the Good Practice Assessment Guidelines (both of which were online with participants given the links in their instructions).

We kept the minimum requirement as four postings, however, the last posting was changed from a request to post a 'solution' to the scenario and an evaluation of the role-play. The structure for the final

posting was to be suggestions for how the *Teaching and Learning Code of Practice* and the *Good Practice Assessment Guidelines* could be made to be more relevant to new teachers.

Evaluation of re-designed role-play

The final evaluation was carried out at an informal "coffee and cake" gathering where participants were able to reveal their online identities, discuss with other participants their feelings toward the role-play as well as giving the moderators feedback. The verbal feedback at this meeting was very positive and encouraging. Participants stated that they spent some time reflecting and thinking the issues through but that the actual contributions didn't take long. They were all positive toward the exercise as an effective means of becoming familiar with policy documents. Figure 2 describes the revised role-play.

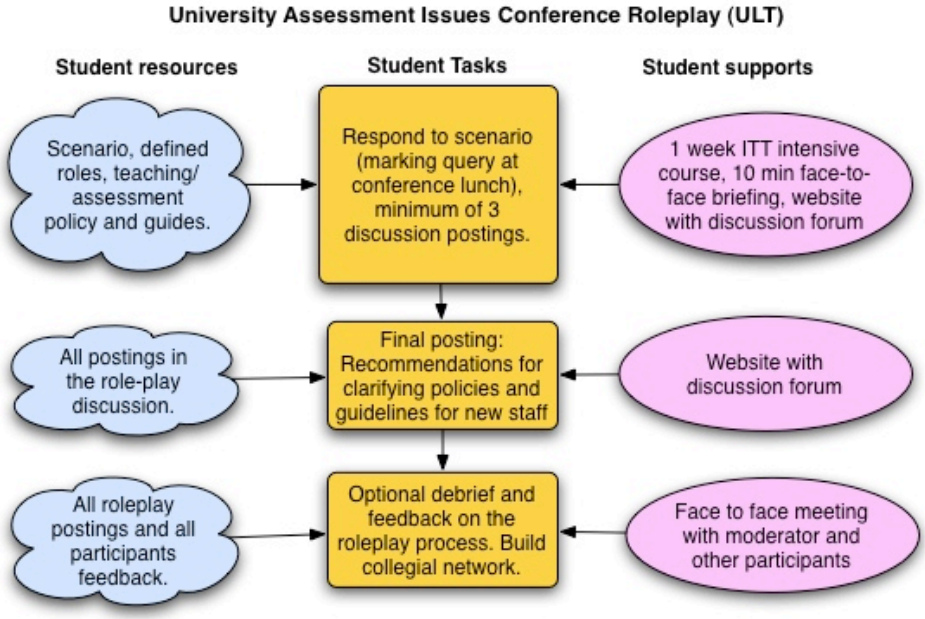

Figure 2: Learning design model (tasks, resources, supports) of the revised ULT role-play

Outcome

The redesigned role-play was very successful. There were two parallel role-plays with eight participants in each group. Both groups had energetic engagement with the first assessment scenario, which required three postings. The final posting was a more formal contribution "What suggestions do you have for making the policy/guidelines more useful for new teachers at UoW?"

As can be seen from Table 1, the level of participation was met by all participants, with six participants providing more than the required minimum. This was one of the key goals of the re-design.

Table 1. Level of participation

Day	Number of Posts	Participants who had no contributions.	Participants who had all preliminary contributions completed.	Participants who had completed the final stimulus contribution.
5	20	3	6	4
10	54	0	12	8
14	79	0	14 (100%)	14 (100%)
One participant made more than double i.e. nine contributions in total. Six participants made more than the required minimum four posts,				

The actual suggestions for how the new staff members felt the policies and guidelines could be modified to be more relevant for new staff were thought provoking and provided valuable feedback to management. The students felt that a short course familiarising them with the teaching policies and practices prior to teaching was necessary in addition to the "corporate" induction covering broad staff responsibilities e.g.. OH&S & EEO. They were also in favour of continuing the ULT course and saw that as effective.

Both role play spaces promoted intense traffic with over 1000 visits in the two weeks, 511 on role play one and 567 on role play two. The discussion space was not closed down at the completion of the role-play (at the end of two weeks) and interestingly the participants continued to use this forum as a means of expressing their views and expanding their ideas.

Overall we feel that the changes made to the scenario, roles and assessment requirements were successful at meeting the learning objectives set down for the participants. This would not have been possible in the short development time unless we were re-using a learning design format which had been successful in the past. It also met the development team's aspirations of enabling the return of high levels of engagement and interactivity or 'momentum' which was present in the original role-play but had waned in the most recent two iterations. Minimal follow up emails were required and we had 100% completion of the assessment tasks in the two week role-play period.

Finally a comment from one of the participants,

> What suggestions do you have for making the policy/guidelines more useful for new teachers at UoW?
> The answer is quite easy. Ask them to join role-play :)

Acknowledgements

We would like to pass on our sincere thanks to Maureen Bell of University of Wollongong who developed this online role-play over a number of years. It is on her valuable work and efforts that we have been able to build. The basic structure and idea comes from her. We would also like to acknowledge the ITT and ULT co-ordinators for their insights, most recent moderators for their honesty and preparedness to share experience, and the participation of the new teachers in the role-play itself and their feedback that has shaped the role-play's development.

References

Bell, M. (2001) *Online Role-Play: Anonymity, Engagement and Risk.* Educational Media International ISSN 0952-3987

Devonshire, E. (2006). Re-purposing an online role play activity: Exploring the institutional and pedagogical challenges. Paper presented at the 23rd annual ASCILITE conference: *Who's learning? Whose technology?*, Sydney

Ip, A. & Wills, S. (2002) *Learning designs – Online Role-play* Accessed 17/6/2007 http://www.learningdesigns.uow.edu.au/guides/info/G1/Downloads/TeachersChecklist.pdf

Wills, S. & McDougall, A. (2006). Facilitating uptake of online role play: Reusability, learning objects and learning designs. Paper presented at the 23rd annual ASCILITE conference: *Who's learning? Whose technology?* Sydney.

Sarah Lambert
Manager, Learning Design Unit, Centre for Educational Development & Interactive Resources, University of Wollongong, NSW 2522. Email slambert@uow.edu.au
David Macdonald
Learning Designer, Centre for Educational Development & Interactive Resources, University of Wollongong, NSW 2522. Email davidmcd@uow.edu.au

Please cite as: Lambert, S. & Macdonald, D. (2007). Reuse of a role-play for new university teachers. In *ICT: Providing choices for learners and learning. Proceedings ascilite Singapore 2007.* http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/singapore07/procs/lambert.pdf

Copyright © 2007 Sarah Lambert and David Macdonald
The authors assign to ascilite and educational non-profit institutions a non-exclusive licence to use this document for personal use and in courses of instruction provided that the article is used in full and this copyright statement is reproduced. The authors also grant a non-exclusive licence to ascilite to publish this document on the ascilite web site and in other formats for *Proceedings ascilite Singapore 2007*. Any other use is prohibited without the express permission of the authors.