

## **Open-space Learning in Real World Contexts\***

### **Workshop Practice: Simulation and Role-Play**

#### **1. Description**

There are many purposes for traditional role-play and vocational simulation tasks across the disciplines but it is important to note the following guidelines when working with non-acting students. Firstly, the simulation or role-play should have clear 'given circumstances' and any risks should be taken in a pre-defined space (working in role has tremendous value as a 'formative' learning experience).

Secondly, the role work will be improved by preparation of some kind; you could either distribute prompt cards in advance or you could work practically with students before the simulation begins (this will 'scaffold' the learning). Thirdly, you should be clear with students about any assessment outcomes of the activity and the specific relevance of enactive work to their studies. Fourthly, there will normally be a clear distinction between role-work and the usual learning environment; this could be a time-limit, a change of location or a reversal of established hierarchies. Finally, if you want to 'throw' students into a challenging environment, you should address them outside of the space about the basic encounter they will experience and the specific pedagogic purpose of this encounter. This will ensure levels of engagement by framing the event as 'imaginary' or 'experiential' while supporting the ethical relationship between teacher and student.

#### **2. Learning Possibilities**

Asking students to adopt role or take on a character can have liberating consequences for teaching and learning. Whether working with the concept of 'the mantle of the expert' or using simulation in vocational training contexts, the role-play environment is a potent and flexible open-space for experiential learning. It offers the student some security to take risks not possible in the real world, and can also provide the teacher with embodied responses to course material.

### 3. Examples

*Academic Practice:* One very popular use of simulation and role-play has been to begin a workshop on networking skills by asking participants to encounter a live networking scenario. We had transformed the studio into the 'welcome and registration' section of an academic conference, complete with performers with specific briefs for interaction.

*Chemistry:* Central to our work with science students has been the attempt to embody the elements of the periodic table. This requires the students to research the behavioural properties of their given element, and then to respond to a series of activities which require interaction between the elements (e.g. how does hydrogen move?)

*Cultural Policy:* Using a recognisable game show format, we staged 'The Risk Factor' which required students to assume various roles and improvise within certain situations while under pressure from a masked panel of experts.

\*A National Teaching Fellowship Scheme project, funded by the Higher Education Academy, 2009-11.