

## ***Using Role Play to Contextualize Critical Thinking in the Classroom***

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11:00 am – 12:20pm

David Simkins is an assistant professor in the School of Interactive Games and Media whose scholarly work focuses on the use of role play both as a mechanic in games and as a tool for use in the classroom. He holds a PhD in Education from the University of Wisconsin Madison.

### History of Role Play

- Role play is not Dungeons and Dragons nor did it start with Dungeons & Dragons (circa 1974). Its history is much older and broader than one game or games in general.
- The military has been using role play for many years to allow soldiers to authentically experience what life “on the ground” will be like.
  - Simulated villages with actors playing the roles of the native inhabitants to allow soldiers to interact with them and understand what it will be like to be a military person inside these locales.
- Model UN is a role play
- Mock trials

### Progressive Education

- Constructing our realities by living the experience
- Simulate not just the activity but the practice and culture of the discipline the activity takes place in.
- Role play can force the participants into something very abstract
  - Be an electron in this simulation
  - Be “justice”
- But the more concrete can make it easier for the participants to make the connections to the learning
- On the ethical axis diagram (see supplemental handout), role play exists in the quadrant of critical/descriptive. We situate in the critical (things that are contextual and up for debate) and the descriptive (the way people do behave, not how they ought to behave).

### With the classroom

- Need to create critical disposition towards role play
- Debrief and think through consequences
  - Need that critical debrief to make the right things stick. Role play can be a powerful experience because it is experiential. Make sure the right connections are made and the right messages are remembered.
  - It should happen with enough time after the role play for participants to process what they did and what others did

- Help participants to make the connections between what happened and the course content
- Assessment is not about getting the right answer but about engagement with the process
- Break students into groups and bring them back together to integrate (not argue) the ideas brought out in each group [not a debate – more like what happens in a work environment. Negotiate, NOT debate]
- Strive so that the problem/scenario is not a caricature and neither are the roles the students play.
- Ideology will always creep in, as will personal will which is why the debrief is so important