Role-plays

Introduction: Role-play is viewed by scholars as an effective active learning strategy: it encourages participation among passive learners, adds dynamism to the classroom and promotes the retention of material. Role plays can be short like scenarios or longer and more complex, like case studies, but without a lot of the documentation. The idea is to enable students to experience what it may be like to see a problem or issue from many different perspectives as they assume a role they may not typically take, and see others do the same.

Goals: Computer and engineering students participate in a role-playing collaborative engagement taking up the roles of manager, designer, and user design specialists.

Preparation:

1) Some of the possible teacher roles are:
   a) Facilitator - students may need new information to be 'fed' in by the teacher.
   b) Spectator - The teacher watches the role-play and offers comments and advice at the end.
   c) Participant - It is sometimes appropriate to get involved and take part in the role-play yourself.
2) In order to prepare for the exercise faculty members performs following functions.
   a) Decide on a problem related to the chosen topic(s) of study and a setting for the characters.
   b) It is a good idea to make the setting realistic, but not necessarily real.
   c) Instructors consider choosing and adapting material that other instructors have prepared.
   d) If the characters(s) used in the exercise are people, instructors define his or her goals and what happens if the character does not achieve them.
   e) Instructors work out each characters' background information on the problem
   f) Instructors often prepare maps and data for the students to interpret as part of their background information rather than the conclusions upon which they would ordinarily base their decisions (especially if the characters are scientists).
3) Students participation
   a) Even if there is no advance research assigned, students will need a few moments to look over their characters and get into their roles for the exercise. There are often additional questions:
   b) Why they are doing this in character? Why did instructor decide to make this a role-playing exercise?
   c) Students may have reservations about the character that they have been assigned or about their motives.
   d) Instructors find it helpful to find out about these before the actual role-play.
   e) It can be very difficult for a student to begin researching an issue from a perspective very different from their own because even apparently objective data tends to be reinterpreted as support for pre-existing world-views.
4) Conclusion
   a) The role play activity is followed by a debriefing for the students to define what they have learned and to reinforce it.
   b) This can be handled in reflective essays, or a concluding paragraph at the end of an individual written assignment, or in a class discussion.
   c) The instructor takes this opportunity to ask the students if they learned the lessons defined before the role-play began.

Methods / Procedure:

1) Role plays generally have three types of participants: players, observers, and facilitator(s).
2) They also have three phases, as indicated below:
3) Briefing phase: This stage provides the warm-up, explanations, and asks participants for input on role play scenario.

a) The role play should be somewhat flexible and customizable to the audience.
b) Good role descriptions are sufficiently detailed to let the average person assume the role but not so detailed that there are so many things to remember that it becomes cumbersome.
c) After role assignments, let participants chat a bit about the scenarios and their roles and ask questions.
d) In assigning roles, consider avoiding having visible minorities playing "bad guy" roles.
e) Ensure everyone is comfortable in their role; encourage students to play it up and even overact their role in order to make the point.

4) Play phase: The facilitator makes seating arrangements (for players and observers), sets up props, arranges any tech support necessary, and does a short introduction.
a) Players play roles, and the facilitator keeps things running smoothly by interjecting directions, descriptions, comments, and encouraging the participation of all roles until players keep things moving without intervention, then withdraws.
b) The facilitator provides a conclusion if one does not arise naturally from the interaction.

5) Debriefing phase: Role players talk about their experience to the class, facilitated by the instructor or appointee who draws out the main points.
a) All players should describe how they felt and receive feedback from students and the instructor.
b) If the role play involved heated interaction, the debriefing must reconcile any harsh feelings that may otherwise persist due to the exercise.

Significance of results:

These types of activities provide the following research-based benefits:

1) They provide concrete examples of abstract concepts, facilitate the development through practice of analytical skills, procedural experience, and decision making skills through application of course concepts in real life situations. This can result in deep learning and the appreciation of differing perspectives.
2) They can result in changed perspectives, increased empathy for others, greater insights into challenges faced by others, and increased civic engagement.
3) They tend to increase student motivation and interest, as evidenced by increased rates of attendance, completion of assigned readings, and time spent on course work outside of class time.
4) Studies show greater/longer retention of learned materials.
5) The result is often better teacher/student relations and a more relaxed environment in which the natural exchange of ideas can take place. Students come to see the instructor in a more positive light.
6) They often result in better understanding of complexity of situations. They provide a good forum for a large volume of orderly written analysis and discussion.

Presentation:

The transcript or summary essay of the role-play events are kept in department drives.

The summary essays are shared in the student's social media groups for open comments.

The transcripts and other research material is shared with other faculty members for further use and modifications.

Reflective critique:

1) Discussion have proven to be efficient to deal with the subtler lessons of the exercise.
2) For example, if some characters' goals were achieved and some were not, instructors discuss why, especially if it had nothing to do with how well the student playing the "losing" character had prepared or played that character.
3) For brief role-plays, the students might want to try exchanging roles, especially of opposed characters,

and try the scenario once again.