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Employing AI to enhance in-class role playing scenarios

Role playing is an established active learning technique and may be employed in a variety of courses and instructional contexts. Role playing can deepen student's engagement with course content and help them develop skills while learning course material. Students will use AI to develop their characters and help them craft compelling arguments in the role-play scenarios. This is particularly effective when students are asked to assume roles that are well outside their range of experience.

Learning Objectives

Specific objectives will vary based on course topic. These objectives are related to the critical use of AI in developing characters for the role play scenarios.

Students will:

1. Use an AI tool to generate a persona for a character in an assignment role playing scenario.
2. Engage in a dialogue with that character to determine their views on the assigned scenario
3. Assess the quality of information provided by the AI tool by employing a variety of sources for verification.
4. Employ the insights gained during the dialogue to engage effectively in the role playing scenario

Procedures:

1. Introduce the role playing activity and explain how the activity is relevant to the course material
2. Emphasize the skills being developed through this activity.
 - Communication: Students can practice active listening, social problem solving, and empathy. Role-playing can also help students develop vocabulary, grammar, and confidence in verbal communication.
 - Social skills: Students can learn to collaborate with others, take turns, and interact with people they know.
 - Real-world scenarios: Students can learn skills such as negotiation, debate, teamwork, cooperation, and persuasion.
 - Role-playing can also help students reflect on how knowledge is gained in real life and see how their educational experience relates to their future practice.
 - Perspective: Students can practice seeing multiple perspectives and roles in life.
 - Creativity: Students can foster creativity and storytelling abilities.
3. Explain the parameters of the role playing scenario
4. Assign characters for each student (or they could work in pairs)
5. Ask students to use an AI tool to generate a character persona and to prompt the AI to respond to scenarios using that assigned persona.
6. Students then employ the perspective gained to engage in the role playing scenario.

Example Scenario and characters generated by Chat GPT 3.5 (April 2, 2024):

Scenario Title: "The Wolf Reintroduction Debate"

Scenario Overview: In a college-level course on wildlife conservation, students will participate in a role-playing exercise that simulates a public forum discussion about the reintroduction of wolves to a fictional region known as "Conservatoria." The goal of this exercise is to help students understand and appreciate the multiple perspectives and complexities surrounding wildlife conservation decisions.

Roles:

1. **Conservation Biologist:** You are a wildlife biologist advocating for the reintroduction of wolves to Conservatoria. You believe that wolves are a keystone species and will restore ecological balance to the region.
2. **Rancher:** You are a cattle rancher who opposes the reintroduction of wolves. You are concerned about the potential predation on your livestock and the economic implications for your livelihood.
3. **Ecotourism Entrepreneur:** You run an ecotourism business in Conservatoria and support wolf reintroduction as it can attract tourists interested in wolf-watching tours. You see this as an opportunity for economic growth.
4. **Hunter:** You are an avid hunter who worries that wolf reintroduction will decrease game populations, making hunting more challenging. You value ethical hunting practices.
5. **Environmental Activist:** You are an environmental activist who strongly supports wolf reintroduction and believes it's essential for ecosystem health and biodiversity. You are passionate about conservation.
6. **Local Mayor:** You are the mayor of a town in Conservatoria, and you need to consider both the economic interests of your constituents and the ecological well-being of the region when forming your opinion.

Instructions for the Role-Playing Exercise:

1. Each student will use an AI tool to familiarize themselves with the role they are assigned, including their character's background, interests, and perspectives. They should engage in a dialogue with the AI tool to simulate the kinds of issues that might arise in the role play exercise.
2. The class will convene in a simulated public forum to discuss the issue of wolf reintroduction.
3. Students will take turns presenting their views, making arguments, and responding to others. They should draw on scientific evidence, economic data, and ethical considerations to support their positions.
4. The discussion will be moderated to ensure that each participant has an opportunity to speak and that the conversation remains respectful and focused on the topic.

5. After the discussion, the class can debrief and reflect on the complexity of wildlife conservation decisions, the importance of considering multiple perspectives, and the challenges of finding balanced solutions.

This role-playing scenario encourages students to think critically about the complexities of wildlife conservation, consider the various stakeholders involved, and develop an understanding of how decisions are made in the real world of conservation management. It also provides an opportunity for students to practice effective communication and negotiation skills.

Example character:

Conservation Biologist - Dr. Elena Rodriguez

Background: Dr. Elena Rodriguez is a highly respected wildlife biologist with over 20 years of field experience. She holds a Ph.D. in ecology and has conducted extensive research on the role of top predators in ecosystems. Her work has been published in prominent scientific journals.

Perspective: Dr. Rodriguez firmly believes in the ecological importance of wolves as keystone species. She argues that their reintroduction to Conservatoria is crucial to restore balance in the ecosystem by regulating prey populations and enhancing overall biodiversity. She advocates for science-based conservation decisions.

How would biologist Elena Rodriguez argue in favor of wolf reintroduction?

Biologist Elena Rodriguez would likely present a compelling argument in favor of wolf reintroduction based on scientific evidence and ecological principles. Here's how she might structure her argument:

1. Introduction to Keystone Species Concept:

- Dr. Rodriguez would begin by explaining the concept of keystone species, emphasizing that wolves are crucial for maintaining the health and balance of ecosystems. She would highlight how wolves influence the behavior and abundance of other species, leading to cascading effects throughout the food web.

2. Historical Context:

- She would provide context about the historical absence of wolves in Conservatoria and the ecological changes that have occurred as a result. Dr. Rodriguez would explain that the reintroduction of wolves is an opportunity to restore a more natural and functioning ecosystem.

3. Ecological Benefits:

- Dr. Rodriguez would outline the ecological benefits of wolf reintroduction, emphasizing their role as top predators in regulating prey populations, such as deer and elk. She would explain how this regulation prevents overgrazing and helps maintain healthy plant communities.

4. Biodiversity Enhancement:

- She would argue that wolves contribute to biodiversity by creating habitat heterogeneity and promoting species diversity. Dr. Rodriguez would provide examples of how the presence of wolves can benefit other wildlife, such as scavengers that feed on wolf kills and species that utilize habitat changes resulting from wolf activity.

5. **Scientific Evidence:**

- Dr. Rodriguez would present scientific studies and research findings supporting wolf reintroduction, including data on ecosystem dynamics before and after wolf extirpation in similar habitats. She would emphasize the importance of evidence-based conservation practices.

6. **Mitigation Strategies:**

- She would address concerns about potential conflicts with livestock and hunting interests by discussing mitigation strategies, such as compensation programs for ranchers, non-lethal deterrents, and adaptive management approaches. Dr. Rodriguez would emphasize the need for collaborative efforts to find solutions that balance conservation goals with human interests.

References and resources:

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<https://www.niu.edu/citl/resources/guides/instructional-guide/role-playing.shtml>

Role Play and Simulations from University of Miami <https://academictechnologies.it.miami.edu/explore-technologies/technology-summaries/role-play-and-simulations/index.html>

Role Play (from Harvard University's Derek Bok Center) <https://ablconnect.harvard.edu/role-play-research>

Role Play and Simulation from UC San Diego <https://www.sandiego.edu/student-affairs/assessment/learning-strategies/role-play.php>