

Chapter 10

Rethinking Reusability: Implications from a Longitudinal Study of Online Role-Play in Australian Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides the results of a study that tracked the use of fifty-three online role-plays in Australian higher education over the period 1990–2006, calculating that forty-five of these were a reuse of another role-play. Most reused the design of another role-play (82%) whereas only a handful reused a role-play itself (18%) which confirms the relevance of learning designs as a reusability construct but raises concerns about learning objects. The instances of reuse of the same role-play involved four role-plays which were analyzed in more detail. This fuller history of reuse post-2006 provided a rich sample for: Exploring issues around what is meant by “reuse,” describing factors that could improve the design of reusable learning objects (RLOs). The implications from this study apply in particular to RLOs that involve active, authentic and collaborative learning such as online role-plays.

RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND

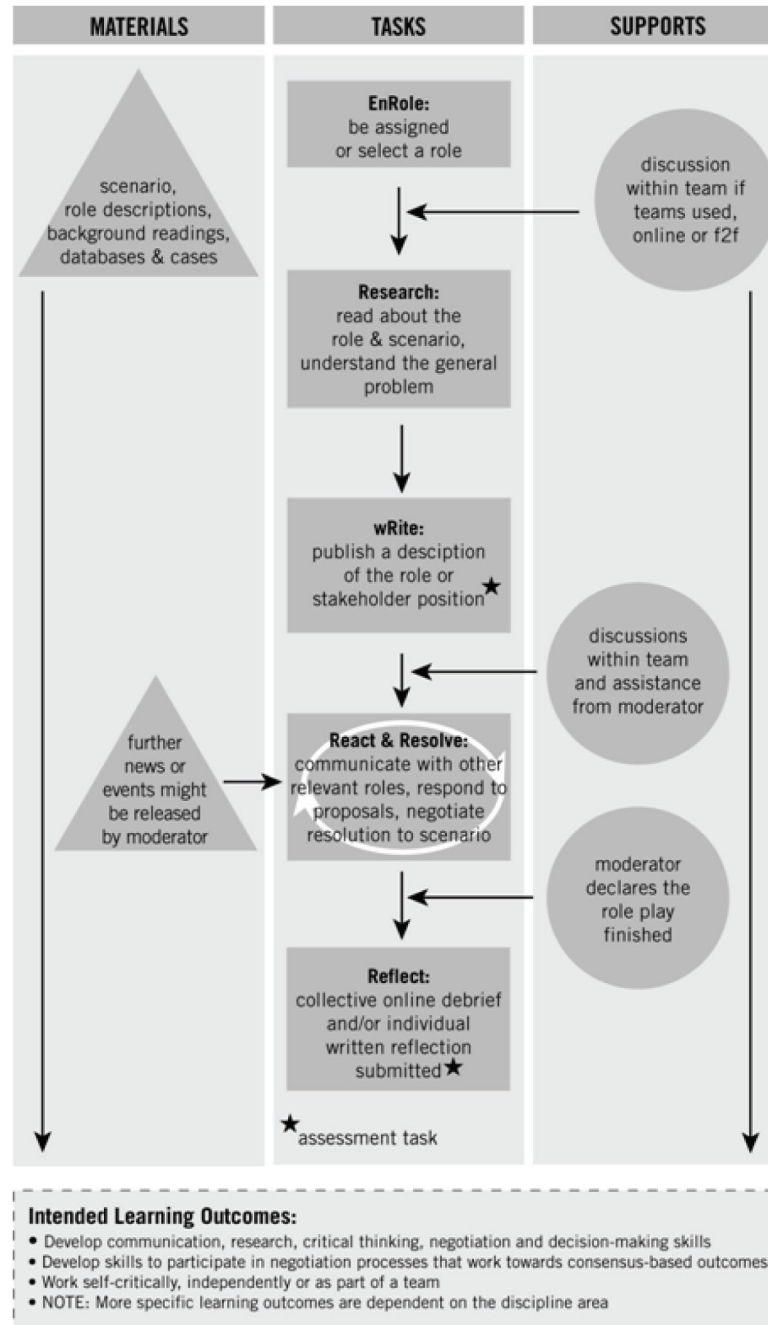
Role-plays are situations in which learners take on the role profiles of specific characters or organizations in a contrived setting. Role-play is designed primarily to build first person experience in a safe and supportive environment. Figure 1 illustrates the sequence of learning activities for a generic online role-play from the students’ perspective. In

a recent Australian national project to encourage uptake of role-based online learning environments in university education, Project EnROLE (Wills et al., 2009, p. 2, 10), the following characteristics of online role-play were adopted as a definition:

- Designed to increase understanding of real life human interaction and dynamics
- Participants assume a role in someone else’s shoes or in someone else’s situation

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Figure 1. Learning Design Visual Sequence for online role-play (Wills, Leigh, & Ip, 2011) modified from Wills and Ip (2002)



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