

## A DIFFERENT LUNCH

### ABSTRACT

*An on-line role play simulation facilitates the creation of an interactive social environment containing leadership challenges from diverse perspective. By stepping into the roles of key stakeholders, students are required to respond to an incident at a child-care centre.*

*This role play highlights the benefits and challenges of e-Learning as a tool to promote critical thinking in relation to decision making as early childhood leaders.*

### KEYWORDS

Early Childhood Education; Leadership; Critical thinking skills, Anti-discrimination; Equality; Blended learning; e-Learning; Reusability.

### CONTACT

Assoc Prof Manjula Waniganayake, Macquarie University  
[manjula.waniganayake@mq.edu.au](mailto:manjula.waniganayake@mq.edu.au)  
Sue Wilks, University of Melbourne [suew@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:suew@unimelb.edu.au)

### DESCRIPTION

The start-up scenario, distributed to students in the form of a short video on a CD-ROM, portrays an altercation between a member of staff and a parent at a fictional child-care centre. This scenario highlights cross-cultural communication issues and leads to a variety of questions dealing with appropriate behaviour of staff and parents. These issues include the importance of timely action; the need for appropriate policies and procedure to be in place; and the importance of maintaining relationships with other professionals in government and the media. In playing their roles, participants are required to make decisions about diverse concerns, taking into account their stakeholders' perspective.



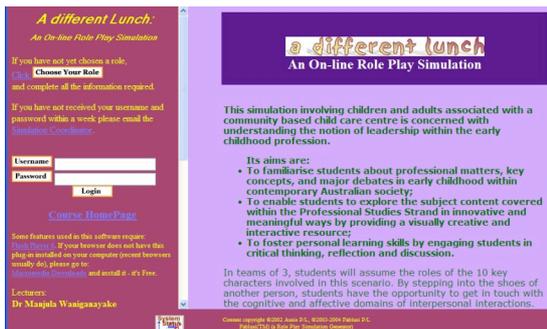
### AUDIENCE/GROUP SIZE

First run in 2004 within the final year of a Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies.

In teams of 2-3, participants assume the identity of one of ten roles.

Two parallel role plays were conducted with 30 participants in each, making a total of 60 students in the two worlds.

### LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES



The nature and type of issues that arise varies between individual instances of the role play because participants determine the stakeholders' cultural identity and social position. This, to some extent, determines the direction of the storyline in each simulation. Second, there is sufficient complexity and flexibility in the start-up scenario to give rise to a variety of leadership topics and issues, and all of these will not surface during any one role play.

### TIME AND SETTING

A Different Lunch was designed as a 4-week activity within the pre-service Early Childhood and Leadership programs at the University of Melbourne.

### RESOURCES

A Different Lunch blends face-to-face university learning and online role playing. The online role playing component operated within Fablusi online role play simulation platform (version 1) providing synchronous and asynchronous communication tools including interaction spaces, private communication among roles, chat (with booking to ensure private discussions as requested by roles). Tasks at different stages provide a structure and assessment opportunities.

## ASSESSMENT

All the assessment tasks for the semester were built around the role play and, with the exception of the final issues paper, tasks were submitted on-line.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

As a role play simulation, '*A Different Lunch*' utilises a video as the scenarios and events modelled on real world interactions. In all instances throughout simulation, participants must respond in a way that faithfully represents the aims, goals and strategies of their role.

The design of the role play simulation was fashioned and operationalised along three levels of interaction: between roles, between students playing a particular role as a team, and between students and us, as their educators. Playing a role that is characterised as having these ideas, beliefs, and values etc., enabled students to explore relationships without the emotional difficulties associated with holding them as individuals.

At the level of playing the role as a team, a variety of beliefs and values could then be discussed among team members. In 'going public', students were required to come to some agreement on how to manage diverse beliefs and values held by team members by presenting it through a single role.

Finally, at the level of student interaction with us, the findings from the first simulation showed a gradual movement away from wanting technical assistance, to an interest in reflecting on critical issues for early childhood educators.

The students play out their role anonymously and in team.

<b>Briefing Stage</b>	Participants are introduced to the processes and rules before being allocated a role which they must represent throughout the simulation.
<b>Role Profile Stage</b>	Trigger events are released as CD-ROM. Participants (as a group playing a role) embellish the role and publish their role profiles online.
<b>Interaction Stage</b>	Participants research issues as well as using negotiation and political lobbying to try to influence the position taken by other roles within the simulation.
<b>Debriefing Stage</b>	Role Summary: Participants reflect on the experience and write up the role summary online which is also published for the rest of the group. The role summary is written as individual players instead of as a role.

## REUSABILITY

The structure and methods of "A Different Lunch" are modeled on the highly successful and robust *role play simulation framework* implemented in Fablusi (<http://www.fablusi.com>). Several levels of reuse are currently available:

- re-run of the simulation as it is currently configured (students self-select preferred roles pending lecturer approval)
- re-use of roles (with a change of scenario)
- re-use of the introduction video for other classroom and/or online use
- adaptation for inter-professional; inter-discipline learning

## REFERENCE

2004, "A Different Lunch: Role-play simulations in preparing early childhood leaders (.pdf)" IASTED International Conference on Web Based Education, Innsbruck, Austria, 16-18 February. Available online <http://www.simplay.net/LOW/papers05/LeadershipChallenges.pdf>