ABSTRACT

This online role play is part of the academic preparation program for international students at the University of Adelaide. By playing a role in a hypothetical homestay scenario, participants are encouraged to deepen their appreciation of multiple perspectives on issues surrounding homestay for international students.

KEYWORDS

International students, homestay, multiculturalism

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DESCRIPTION

The scene for this role play centres on a homestay program offered by the English Language Centre of a fictional University of Billingham which is recognised as an institution of excellence in education. The homestay program offers international students with an opportunity to immerse in the Australian culture while improving their English language proficiency. Trigger events introduce a number of conflict situations which are discussed by participants who represent the views of parents and students involved in the homestay program.

AUDIENCE/GROUP SIZE

There were 14 university students from other countries who trialled the role play. As there are 7 roles, two students had to share a role. One of them shared the role of the Homestay coordinator with the class teacher. This role play can be used with international students attending any General English Program, General English for Academic Purposes, and any English language course for international students

TIME AND SETTING

The Homestay e-sim was trialed in a five-week program –General English for Academic Purposes (GEAP) - at the English Language Centre, at the University of Adelaide, in October 2008. The duration of the activity was 2 weeks, starting in week 2 of the program.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

This learning design aims to enable students to develop the following skills:
- Group work skills
- Negotiation skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Decision-making skills
- English language skills
- Ability to look at an issue from different perspective
- English language skills
- Autonomy and collaborative learning skills

ASSESSMENT

Each student had to write a reflective journal about their learning experiences. Suggested points for reflection:
- What they did (describing the process)
- What they learnt from the activity
- What they liked about the role-play and why
- What they disliked about the role-play and why

The reflective journal was 20% of the total written assessment. Student participation and approach to the task was 20% of the total Student Participation and Demonstrated Skills component.

RESOURCES

The participants used the discussion board on MyUni, the Adelaide University website, for their asynchronous communication. Private forums were created for discussions between students and students, parents and parents, parents and students. Participants sharing the same role could opt to have face-to-face or online discussions to decide how to play the role and what to post in the discussion board.

The pre-role play activities and discussion were done in the classroom. The introduction to the use of the discussion board and the survey were done in the computer suite at the English Language Centre. The survey and the reflective journal task sheet were created by the teacher who was also the facilitator.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Homestay

Stage 1: pre-role play activities- survey, face-to-face role-play, introduction to discussion board, online discussion

Stage 2: briefing, objectives of the role play, allocating roles, interaction (announcements are released to stimulate discussion)

Stage 3 : progress report, debriefing, and evaluation (reflective journal on their learning experience)

Students engage in the following activities:

Introduction: students introduce themselves as their personas in the discussion board. They read the other personas introductions and comment.

Parent forum: discussion of what they like and dislike about their homestay experience

Homestay student forum: discussion of their experiences/problems/misunderstandings

Homestay parent/homestay student forum: discussion of their problems/misunderstandings. Discussion of possible strategies and solutions

Progress report: homestay parents and students complete a survey and evaluate their performance and learning experiences.

FACILITATOR ISSUES

The facilitator needs to:

Become familiar with the online environment: My Uni and discussion board.; Allocate roles or allow students to choose their roles.; Form teams if students are sharing a role.; Distribute logins and passwords; Set up a discussion board activity to be completed in the computer room (eg. "What do you plan to do in Adelaide?").

Pre-role-play in class:	In the computer room induction exercise:	During the role play:
Organise an ice breaker activity: (not necessarily a getting to know each other) as themselves.	Navigating around MyUni	Monitor the postings in the discussion board
Conduct a face-to-face role play.	Discussion board activity in the computer room (What they plan to do in Adelaide)	Monitor students' participation
Discuss issues they may have in role plays (evaluating the activity).	Discussion: differences between emails and discussion board messages	Improvise other triggers if necessary
Find out what the students know about online environment and online role-plays.	Homework set: participate in discussion board activity over the weekend (follow-up on Monday)	Post role play
	Make sure the students understand the learning objectives and assessment task	Help students disengage from their roles
	Give the students their persona IDs and passwords	Encourage students to reflect on the activity
	Notify students that as of this point, the facilitator (teacher) will monitor the discussion, but will not be directed involved in the role play	Discuss with the students the outcome of the role-play
		Provide feedback on their participation

REUSABILITY

The Homestay e-sim can be adapted according to the level of the students. In this case, the students were at an intermediate level.

REFERENCES AND LINKS

Our team received academic support from the Online Learning Unit which is part of the Centre for Learning and Professional Development (CLPD), University of Adelaide, in particular Ann Davenport and Judi Baron.