Important objectives of Knowledge and Employability courses include helping students analyze issues, evaluate actions and decisions, connect classroom knowledge to real-world situations, and develop problem-solving skills. Role-playing and simulations can be effective ways to achieve these goals.

Role-playing

Role-playing is the spontaneous acting out of situations, without costumes or scripts. The context for the role-play is presented and roles are selected. Students have minimal planning time to discuss the situation, choose different alternatives or reactions and plan a basic scenario. At the conclusion, students discuss how they felt and what they learned about that particular situation. The most important part of role-play is the follow-up discussion.

Benefits of Role-playing

Role-playing can be an effective strategy for practising new skills and exploring new ideas in the Knowledge and Employability classroom. It addresses several of the multiple intelligences, and can be a motivating and memorable learning activity.

Role-playing can help students:
- express themselves verbally
- show creativity
- develop appropriate and positive attitudes
- understand the feelings of others
- become actively involved in the learning situation
- practise skills in a nonthreatening environment.

For example, a mock job interview that simulates “the real thing” can do much to develop desirable behaviours and attitudes. In a trusting atmosphere, students can practise answering and asking questions, dressing and speaking professionally, and using verbal and nonverbal communication skills. Because the scenario is meaningful but nonthreatening, students are also better able to accept feedback or coaching tips. The interview could even be taped so students have a chance to review their own performance.
Implementing Role-playing
When using role-plays in the Knowledge and Employability classroom, consider the following guidelines.

- Always have students role-play the positive aspects of a skill or situation. If it is necessary to role-play a negative situation, the teacher should take on the negative role.
- Provide a specific situation.
- Provide a limited time for students to develop and practise their role-plays (5 to 10 minutes is usually sufficient).
- Limit the use of costumes and props.
- Provide ample time for proper expression of attitudes and clarification of misunderstandings following each role-playing activity.
- Provide students with tips for participating and observing.

Tips for participating
Share and discuss the following tips with role-play participants.

- Face the audience, and speak loudly and clearly.
- Don’t rely on props or costumes. Use words and body language to communicate your message.
- Focus on your role-play partners and the message you want to communicate.
- Assess your participation by asking yourself the following questions.
  – Did I identify with the people involved?
  – Were all the important aspects of the situation portrayed?
  – Did we use all the ideas from our planning session in the role-play?
  – Did we portray new skills or concepts accurately?

Tips for observing
Share and discuss the following tips for being supportive observers.

- Demonstrate good listening by being quiet and attentive during the role-play.
- Show support by clapping and using positive words of encouragement and feedback.
- Laugh at the appropriate moments. Do not laugh at role-play participants.

Assessing role-plays
During role-play, observe how students handle the situations represented and consider the following questions.

- Are concepts being expressed accurately in language and action?
- Are any students confused or uncertain about the purpose of the role-play, the situation or their role?
- Should space arrangements or materials be changed?
To extend the learning from role-plays, consider the following questions.
- What issues were clarified through the role-play?
- What misconceptions may have been presented?
- What questions did the role-play raise?
- What new information is needed?
- What links does this role-play have to future tasks that extend or broaden the topic?

Simulations

Simulations can be used to explore key themes, issues or events, often in an integrated cross-curricular manner. Generally, simulations of this kind operate like more structured role-plays. All students in the class are assigned specific roles and interact with each other in the context of the established scenario. Simulations can be commercially purchased or locally developed, and can be used continuously or at intervals. They do not necessarily require a lot of materials, complicated rules or many days to implement.

Benefits of simulations
Simulations have many of the same benefits as role-playing. They allow students to explore concepts, practise skills, relate to others, see multiple perspectives and engage in multiple modes of learning. Because simulations generally explore complex real-world issues and events, they can be excellent opportunities to strengthen critical thinking, problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills.

Implementing simulations
Consider the following strategies for implementing effective simulations.
- Focus on a truly important theme. Sample situations or issues could include:
  - historical events and perspectives (e.g., Aboriginal vs. French vs. English perspectives on the fur trade).
  - environmental issues (e.g., building of a dam; pollution).
- Take into account as many aspects of the theme as possible, including chance happenings and personal characteristics of the participants.
- Arrange the classroom space to facilitate the simulation (e.g., round table).
- Assign roles randomly.
- Encourage the emotional involvement of all participants. Before and after the simulation, discuss how emotion is an important element in the situation being explored.
- Discuss the expectations for the simulation, including staying in role and using appropriate communication skills. If the simulation runs over several class periods, review these ground rules as necessary.
• Begin with a common or shared experience for all participants so that new knowledge can be incorporated in with the familiar.
• Allow students to make decisions in the context of the simulation. Do not intervene unless absolutely necessary, and then do so as unobtrusively as possible (e.g., in the guise of a character).
• Use cooperative grouping to stress the importance of social issues.
• Use many channels of student learning, and incorporate as many academic areas as possible.
• Invest significant time in talking about the experience after it is completed. This processing and reflection is essential for students to connect their own experiences during the simulation to the larger issue being explored.