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Death of the Role-Play

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Editors' Note: *"Is this a dagger I see before me, the handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee"…Alexander and LeBaron argue for a Lady Macbeth-like determination toward removing role-plays from their enthroned position in negotiation training. Their substitution by younger, more vigorous teaching tools, they argue, would be good for the commonweal.*

The Ambushed Student

I don't mind doing role-plays, the student explained in front of the group, *as long as there are no tricks, you know?*
Hmmm, pondered the facilitator, *Do I know?*
Like, I don't wanna look stupid…
Me neither, said the facilitator to herself.
I know you guys like to withhold facts sometimes – and that sets us up to fail. That's just not fair. And it's embarrassing, too.

Setting someone up to fail does indeed sound unfair. In fact it could be described as an ambush – outlaw facilitators lying in wait for unsuspecting students. Not only is this unsettling in a training environment, we can ask whether this lack of transparency runs counter

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to the behavior expected of negotiators and mediators. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Far from being a figment of our fertile imaginations, this short vignette is drawn from a real life learning situation at which both authors were present. Participants were asked at the beginning of the postgraduate workshop about their learning preferences. While most replied enthusiastically about learning in an interactive and experiential manner, one student voiced considerable fear about the use of role-plays. Her concerns were based on her past experiences in conflict resolution workshops.

This small yet significant moment in learning – for facilitators and participants – fuelled our curiosity.

N: *Michelle, what was that about?*

M: *I'm not really sure, Nadja. She seemed very angry about her previous role-play experience.*

N: *Yes, and she was very clear that she did not want to be put into a similar situation here.*

M: *It's hard to know what a similar situation would be – after all what's in a role-play?*

N: *Everyone knows what a role-play is.*

M: *Really? I think everyone thinks that everyone else agrees with what they think a role-play is.*

N: *I'm completely confused.*

M: *Exactly! There is a bewildering lack of clarity about this most ubiquitous of all experiential learning tools. Take a look at Wikipedia and you can see why – it says that the origin of the idea of simulations can be traced to "a deceiving by actions, gestures or behavior"* (Wikipedia 2008).

N: *Are we even clear about why we use role-play?*

M: *I think many people use role-play to teach skills. Using role-plays in negotiation training has become as common as Santa at Christmas…*

N: *Or drinking beer at the Oktoberfest…*

M: *Or expecting snow in a Canadian winter!*

N: *I guess people use role-play as a way of creating a real life situation to heighten the learning effect for the "real world."*

M: *Hmmm – how successful do you think role-play is in achieving this?*

N: *Not very. That's why I don't use role-plays anymore.*

M: *You don't?*

N: *No.*

M: *Not ever?*

N: *I never ask participants to assume a role that is not their own.*

M: *So you don't want them playing at imitating reality?*

N: *Exactly.*

M: *But they can play themselves in role-play?*

N: *Yes – if you're after a real life situation, then you can't do better than playing yourself. And it's a lot more realistic than asking an American lawyer to play a Kung Fu instructor from Taiwan with five minutes preparation.*

M: *It's easy to fall into stereotypes then isn't it?*

N: *Is it ever! And here we are in the twenty-first century promoting negotiation and mediation as culturally sensitive tools!*

M: *Oh this is a disaster waiting to happen....*

N: *Hang on. It's not all doom and gloom. There are risks associated with role-play, but these are manageable.*

M: *Right, so if you understand the limits of the role-play, you can get the most out of it?*

N: *What can we do about it? Let's write something short and sassy. We need a provocative title.*

M: *What about – Death of the Role-play?*

What Are We Trying to Achieve in Negotiation Training?

Let's explore why a whole range of experiential learning approaches may suit training goals better than repeated uses of role-plays. We begin with identifying some of the most common goals of negotiation training, some specific and others more diffuse. These goals include:

- Communicating a range of specific content, such as approaches to negotiation theory and practice;
- Presenting and exploring the relative utility of various tactics and strategies;
- Shifting competitive attitudes and approaches to more collaborative strategies;
- Fostering skill development in communication and problem-solving;
- Provoking critical reflection on negotiation practices; and working from a range of theories to inform practice.

As trainers, we want participants not only to consider new ideas, but to change attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. We know that attitude and behavioral change do not arise only from hearing concepts

from a "sage on stage," but from actual experiences that give participants embodied perspectives of the possibilities of collaborative problem-solving and negotiation. So far, so good: we agree that getting people engaged is vital to effective negotiation training. Not only does it keep their attention, it sets up the conditions under which durable change in attitude and behavior may occur.

Teaching specific concepts such as the relative benefits of collaboration over competition often involves a shift for participants accustomed to the competitive norms inherent in many educational, social and organizational (including labor relations and employment) spaces. This shift is not only cognitive, but affective: for participants to change their strategies and attitudes in negotiation, it is useful for them to come face to face with the limited fruits of competitive negotiations. While the promise of "win-win" may have been oversold, we try to provide experiences in which participants learn that collaborative approaches to negotiation can at least yield "mostly ok-mostly ok" solutions that support ongoing, interdependent relationships.

Beyond the level of these goals, there are deeper objectives at play. We depend on participants becoming at least a little more familiar with their inner terrains – to notice their often-engrained "scripts" that might lead to conflict escalation, and counter these with principled, creative strategies. What motivates someone to go through such a process of self-analysis and development? It can be hard work, after all, interrupting old, often-unconscious tracks of "common sense."

Enter the Role-Play

Role-plays, at first blush, are a good start. They are engaging and often entertaining ways of catching people in their old competitive negotiating habits. While known under different labels including simulations, practice sessions, and games, role-play appears as the most widely used term. Essentially it refers to a learning activity in which participants are asked to assume a role, the characteristics of which are usually provided to them in written form, and to play out a negotiation or part of a negotiation with others who also have assumed roles. In negotiation training circles, role-plays have become arguably the most popular form of experiential learning. But there are pitfalls in this terrain.

In a wide range of settings from Aboriginal communities in Canada to international gatherings in Europe, we have noticed that taking on others' identities may be perceived as disrespectful and nonsensical. When a group has a strong ethic of non-interference, then "playing" someone else may feel inappropriate and invasive.

While role-playing does exist in social spaces in cultures around the world, it is generally a part of elaborately marked social rituals involving masks, music, drumming and other markers of "time outside of ordinary time" that clearly communicate the limited purposes of the role-play. Without such markers, it is an approach that – for many – may be fraught with pitfalls and potential traps. Not only does it elicit cultural stereotypes (which may be all that are available to inform the playing of an unfamiliar identity), but it literally takes people "out of their skins" into a synthetic situation that may have little relevance to their lives, and limited transferability to actual negotiations.

Beyond cultural challenges are questions of neurophysiology and learning. What ingredients facilitate effective learning? Which elements will enable durable cognitive and affective shifts, internalization of new approaches and ongoing implementation of new strategies? From sports psychology and neuroscience comes the insight that mental rehearsal is useful in improving performance. Going through physical motions in imaginal ways, combined with the trial and error of practice, is an effective way to get better as an athlete. This is true even at an elite level, as the case of Laura Wilkinson shows. Wilkinson, a diving athlete from the United States, had suffered a serious injury in her preparation for the 2000 Olympics, which prevented her from training in the usual physical manner. During this time she used mental imagery to visualize her dives. At the same Olympics, still in pain from her injury and to the surprise of the world, she won a gold medal. Significantly, athletes using this approach are not imagining themselves to be other people (Roure et al. 1998). They are imagining *themselves* doing their sport in optimized ways. Their objective is to improve their skill, so practicing physically and mentally with critical feedback makes perfect sense. And it works.

Why would this not be the case for negotiation participants? Is practicing authenticity and life-like applications not also important in principled negotiation? Does the immediacy of a real situation evoke qualities of veracity in more compelling ways than something that can be discounted as a "game?" We argue that it does.

Often, the argument in favor of role-plays is put something like this: participants will get distracted by their emotions and attributions if they use situations that are real and from familiar contexts. Skill-building is best fostered by taking people away from the familiar and helping them separate and practice new tools. This reduces distraction and helps participants practice techniques in isolation.

The key word in the previous paragraph is "isolation." Learning is contextual. Moreover, relational-identity theory tells us that we

identify ourselves differently in different contexts, and as a result our behavior varies (Shapiro 2006). People need context to interpret and understand ideas, and apply skills appropriately for a variety of real life situations. They need to be able to recognize and develop flexible strategies to deal with the emotional tension inherent in real negotiating situations where something important is at stake, and they need to understand the impact of their own attitudes to risk in negotiations. When context is artificial, knowledge and skills may be similarly artificial, thus reducing the likelihood of the transfer of skills into real situations.

We have observed hundreds of role-plays, and have seen some brilliant acting. But we are not convinced that these "actors" necessarily transfer their stellar performances to effective behavior in real situations. Many participants in negotiation trainings report that they are better able to make the transfer from learning situations to real life when they have opportunities to respond in contexts that are as realistic as possible and that evoke authentic responses from them.

The Staying Power of Role-Play: 'Til Death Do Us Part?

Given these concerns about role-plays, why are they so ubiquitous? The answer has to do with ideas about the multiple benefits of this approach, as well as expediency and habit. It is pretty well accepted by negotiation trainers that role-plays are useful. They are thought to "spice up" a course, and they do bring color because they contain stories. These stories are often exaggerated to engage participants, evoking humor and vitality through clever characterizations and plot developments. Such elements are critical in a writing class. But they may be distracting and counterproductive in negotiation training if they take participants' attention away from the dynamics of conflict and the skills needed to negotiate well.

Role-plays are often lauded for the high levels of engagement they stimulate. Linking comprehension with motivation through role-playing is said to yield deeper and broader learning (Jansiewicz 2004). Yet if colorful plots and theatrical nuances lead participants to demonstrate their improvisational flares – getting into the spirit of the activity by embellishing characters and chasing dramatic effect – we may not be as far ahead as we have hoped. With this caution in mind, we turn to the question of trainer preferences for role-plays.

Trainers like role-plays for a variety of reasons. Once written, they provide a ready-made resource that can be used repeatedly in different settings. They are animating – a good change of pace from more didactic training. Role-plays also contribute to positive evalua-

tions; as participants enjoy themselves, a climate of motivation and interest infuses the learning environment (Movius 2008).

It is true that role-plays are more riveting than lectures from most faculty members. They invite and require participants to take an active part in learning. Activity by participants is certainly preferable to somnambulistic states. But there are many ways to actively engage participants. What if negotiation trainers had dozens of types of experiential activities to draw upon in their work? Would changing modes communicate the importance of flexibility and creativity more fully than peppering training programs with variations on a singular role-play format? We think it might. Even if role-plays are kept in the standard toolkit of trainers, varying experiential vehicles to address different elements of a negotiation would facilitate learning by those with diverse learning styles and ways of paying attention (Sogunro 2004).

In addition, there are concerns about transferability of skills used by role-players. It is widely believed that skills learned and demonstrated in role-plays will be successfully applied in the "wider world." But will they? Let's take a look at the research on this question. There is evidence that role-play is increasingly being used to train and assess a range of skills and behaviors such as communication, interviewing, counseling, negotiation and mediation skills (Movius 2004; Van Hassalt, Romano, and Vecchi 2008). Moreover there is a great deal of writing extolling the virtues of role-plays in fields from political science to economics to dispute resolution (Armstrong 1987; Sogunro 2004). But much of this is anecdotal, or uses simple measures immediately following a role-play without any subsequent structured reflection, follow up or observation in naturalistic environments.

The overall effectiveness of role-plays to impart skills that are later transferred into real life settings has been questioned by a number of studies (Lewicki 2000; Movius 2004; Van Hassalt, Romano, and Vecchi 2008). A review of the literature on this subject by Dan Druckman and Noam Ebner concludes that the use of role-play may heighten students' interest, motivation and positive attitudes toward a course (Druckman and Ebner 2008). There is also some evidence that role-plays may stimulate learning, resulting in longer retention of information than in settings where students are more passive. Apart from these aspects of learning, Druckman and Ebner's review of relevant empirical studies indicated no significant difference in student learning based on the use of role-plays compared with more conventional lecture-oriented teaching methods (Druckman and Ebner 2008). It seems therefore that the use of role-

play in teaching has not shown itself to enhance concept learning, analytical skills and real life skills transfer.

In light of this research, it is clear that role-plays are not without challenges. Some specific difficulties associated with this mode include participants taking roles too far and exaggerating characters. Such dramatic excess is not only poor acting, it undermines the effectiveness of the experience for everyone else in that group. Role-plays are artificial, and may also spawn the opposite problem: participants often do not experience much connection to roles, and may not play them authentically. They can also become boring for participants whose imaginations are not caught by contrived roles. If role-plays aim to give training participants effective facsimiles of real life experiences and valuable opportunities to try strategies, this lack of connection may thwart the goal. We have seen participants on many occasions "go through the motions" of a role-play, quite aware that they don't care one way or another about the outcome. As in real life, when we don't care about an outcome, there is little to stimulate our commitment or full involvement in an exchange.

What Alternatives Are There?

Given these concerns, we believe role-play use in diverse settings should be limited and complemented with other experiential activities. What alternatives exist? How do we make negotiation learning more effective and transferable to real life situations? Many years ago when faced with this dilemma in negotiation teaching, one of us was fortunate enough to encounter the world of adventure learning. One manifestation of this form of learning is featured in international Outward Bound programs. Adventure learning is frequently used in leadership and teambuilding courses, yet it is relatively neglected in negotiation and conflict resolution training. But why? Like role-playing, it offers participants the opportunity to participate in experiences followed by a period of reflection. But there is an important difference: the experiences offered by adventure learning are well beyond anything experienced during role-plays. They are real.

Consider a group on an excursion who are given the simple task of negotiating for lunch. If participants negotiate poorly, they eat poorly. Nothing is more effective than an empty stomach to generate real feelings of frustration, unfair treatment and overall grumpiness. This is great material for reflecting on one's own behavior in negotiation and conflict, because the experience is upfront and personal. Guided reflection after the experience supports perspective and learning to catalyze change on cognitive, affective and kinesthetic levels.

Adventure learning activities extend well beyond the attention grabbing images of abseiling and white water rafting. They include outdoor experiences, both structured (e.g., ropes courses) and informal (hiking and other activities), and other activities that can be done in or out of classrooms with minimal or no props. Where props are used, they can include ropes, buckets, wooden planks, old tires, newspapers, raw eggs, straws, blindfolds, balloons, plastic noodles and a limitless range of other materials.

Adventure learning need not be complex or time-consuming. These activities can fit easily into negotiation training, whether in a two-hour session or a five-day workshop. Some activities, such as the *trust circle*, take between five and ten minutes to conduct and require no props. Others, such as the *human knot*, take up to 30 minutes, depending on participant numbers. More elaborate activities can take longer and involve fieldtrips or props. These and other possibilities are described by Simon Priest and Karl Rohnke (Priest and Rohnke 2000).

The experiences of adventure learning do not come without risk. In fact, it is the element of perceived risk – frequently absent in role-play – that heightens the realness of the experience (Hattie et al. 1997). However, as in a David Lynch film, things in adventure settings are not always as they appear. Most participants are aware of the physical risks such as slipping, falling or being dropped. While these risks are negligible in professionally prepared adventure learning environments, a cognitive focus on physical issues is useful. It raises levels of conscious alertness in the group and allows the subconscious, with its ways of knowing beyond the rational, to directly engage with deeper personal challenges. The same technique is used by the doctor who tells you to wiggle your toes and then quickly inserts a needle into your arm. The results can be surprisingly constructive and even pain free.

And what of the real life context? How will crossing an imaginary "wild river" with limited resources help you confront a tough corporate negotiator? That's where framing comes into play. Do the two ropes carefully placed on a grassy outdoor area (or alternatively in an indoor gymnasium) represent the boundaries of a wild river or are they a metaphor for the parameters of a complex team negotiation? In one activity commonly referred to as *minefield*, you may literally be finding your way through a field of old car tires, balls, foam noodles and other junk, while metaphorically navigating a path through a series of negotiation challenges. In another activity you are lifting your fellow participants through the holes in a larger than life size spider's web comprised of a series of intersecting ropes supported within a frame of metal poles; however, at another level you

are working your way through the layers of trust-building, issue identification, exploration of interests, option generation and implementation of solutions. Adventure learning activities take participants beyond traditional teaching spaces into environments where existing classroom power dynamics no longer apply. In the new environment, a range of skill-sets are in demand and participants must negotiate their place in the "new world order."

Of course, adventure learning is just one form of experiential learning that can complement role-plays. A huge range of creative possibilities loom – experiences involving drawing, miming, improvisation, movement, dance, free-writing, sound (including instruments) – all taking people out of their heads and into their bodies. These and other experiences that draw upon creative methodologies engage participants' visual and kinesthetic learning centers and their emotional histories. Using crayons to draw your own experience of conflict, and s*haring that drawing* can be a powerful experience for participants as they reveal themselves on affective and kinesthetic levels and respond to others' graphic interpretations and interventions. Story-telling activities also draw on the emotional brain. The use of constellations, as derived from the work of Bert Hellinger, offers participants a creative opportunity to develop a deep understanding of underlying issues and relationships from a systemic perspective (Hellinger 2007). In constellation experiences, participants leave cognitive thinking behind as they create physical and emotional maps of conflict and other negotiating situations. Body sculpting activities also engage participants kinesthetically and emotionally, enhancing and deepening learning.

Rational analysis will only take negotiators so far, as scholarship discrediting the "rational actor" shows (Korobkin and Ulen 2000; Hanson and Yosifon 2003-2004). Creativity arises, in part, from changing modes of attention. Part of our task as educators has to be always extending awareness of ways of paying attention, giving negotiators flexible access to diverse resources within themselves and negotiation processes. Using experiential learning in negotiation training helps participants find a path where preaching meets practice and where they can be themselves, deepening awareness of their attitudes and behaviors, seeking to achieve their personal best.

Many of us can remember times in our lives when we did something so well, so excellently, so perfectly…that it appeared effortless. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls this state of being *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi 2003). It is a space of optimal performance and positive emotional experience that pushes our conscious envelope. Earlier we referred to the proven power of mental rehearsal to create and sustain peak performance and flow for athletes. In this context, "men-

tal" refers to whole-brain engagement in imaginal activities. In educational settings, too, visual, auditory, affective, kinesthetic, olfactory and gustatory cues can be called upon in creating desired situations in the mind. We have used this type of mental rehearsal technique with law students several days before they were to take part in a clinical assessment measuring their effectiveness in interviewing a client. Students were required to play themselves while demonstrating effective interviewing skills. In preparation, the students were asked to close their eyes and relax. Faculty talked them through their preparation in groups of two, going over the interview environment, the client-centered process they were to use and how they would engage in a structured reflection with each other afterwards. Throughout the activity, the students were given time to use the power of their imaginations to rehearse the finer details of how they would set up the room, develop rapport with the client, work as a team and so on. While there was no control group with whom to scientifically compare performance outcomes, both students and facilitators considered this guided visualization to have enhanced their performance on the day.

The experiential activities described above share a number of features that differentiate them from basic role-plays. These include:

- A move toward creativity and lateral thinking, and away from the primarily-cognitive workshop environment and its related assumptions about power and hierarchical relationships within the group;
- A challenge to participants to reveal themselves authentically;
- Increased self-discovery through self-participation and reflection;
- More meaningful learning as participants draw directly on their stories, associations, and experiences; and
- Better negotiation performance arising from engaging emotional and kinesthetic brain centers associated with deep shifts in skills, attitudes and behaviors.

Some of you may be thinking that it is all very well to talk about art, adventure and dance, but to use it in negotiating training is a very different matter. How do trainers legitimize the use of non-mainstream learning experiences, especially in "serious" disciplines such as business and law? How do we avoid making fools of ourselves? And what about the students? Are we not placing them in an extremely vulnerable situation? What if they just aren't artistic or adventurous? Even worse, what if we aren't?

These are very real concerns. The next section offers some options to address them.

Moving Role-Plays Out of Isolation: Advocating an Integrated Approach

The future of negotiation training starts today. But that does not mean that we need to abandon role-plays completely and start using only abstract art exercises. It does mean that there are unlimited opportunities to begin to integrate other forms of experiential learning into negotiation training. Start slowly. In your next training course, for example, you might leave out your first role-play and substitute a story-telling or problem-solving activity. Notice how participants respond to the experience. Notice what they reveal about themselves, and how a range of experiential activities create a positive learning climate.

When you do use role-plays, you might consider variations on your current practice. Health scientists tell us that exercise is much more effective if accompanied by stretching than if done on its own. In fact it is even more effective if done regularly and in combination with a healthy diet and low stress, a lifestyle that features balance and meaningful activities. Similarly, emerging empirical research and anecdotal evidence suggests that role-plays are most effective in increasing student learning when combined with immediate opportunities for reflection and feedback (Williams, Farmer, and Manwaring 2008) as well as other learning methods. Roger Volkema, for example, explains how he adds realism to his teaching by adding real financial risk to negotiation role-plays (Volkema 2007). Druckman and Ebner (2008) advocate engaging students in role-play *design*. Their research suggests that getting students to write role-plays rather than enacting them may achieve better learning outcomes with respect to 1) motivation and creativity in relation to the topic, 2) understanding negotiating concepts, and 3) the relationship among these concepts, and 4) retaining information in the short and longer terms (Druckman and Ebner 2008). Melissa Nelken, Bobbi McAdoo and Melissa Manwaring take up in detail the idea of enlisting students in designing parts of a course (or even all of it) and strongly encourage this as a general teaching method (Nelken, McAdoo, and Manwaring, *Negotiating Learning Environments*, in this volume). This approach was used in the Druckman and Ebner study cited above.

Michelle Maiese takes role-play design beyond written form and encourages participants to utilize multiple modes of design including drama, mime, dance, drawing and dialogue (Maiese 2004). Combining role-plays with observation learning – such as a video demonstration – has been shown to more successfully foster skills than the use of role-plays alone (Nadler, Thompson, and Van Boven 2003). Even more powerful is the combination of role-play and di-

verse analogical training in which students compare the application of different negotiation techniques to achieve the same goal – such as value creation – in multiple contexts (Moran, Bereby-Meyer, and Bazerman 2008).

All of these suggestions require heightened attention, focus and mindfulness on the part of the facilitator or trainer. Authenticity – the ability to be yourself – is vital for facilitators moving into previously unknown experiences. If you think an activity is insubstantial, then others will sense your attitude and follow suit. Transparency and signposting your way through activities and other aspects of the training will give participants the opportunity to have input and ask questions, thereby making your journey into new experiences a joint one rather than a solitary venture. Curiosity is more helpful than certainty. A spirit of enquiry and a healthy sense of humor will infuse your students with the same and encourage exploration rather than evaluation. The willingness to ask colleagues and others for help is empowering. Take small steps: knowing your own boundaries and having a sense of others is part of effective pedagogy.

Another important way to set yourself up for success with a range of experiential activities – especially unusual ones – is to attend to how you frame them. Use words that are legitimate for your audience. For example, lawyers may not have positive associations with "playing a game," but may be quite willing to "engage in a learning activity or task." Engineers may respond well to a request to participate in a simulation; nurses' curiosity might be piqued by being invited to explore a case. Staking activities on the truism that identities are not constant and consistent is another important element of framing. As Daniel Shapiro reminds us, identities shift across time and context (Shapiro 2006). Given the dynamism of negotiation processes and identities, experiential learning can be usefully framed as a way to explore changing identities – participants' and counterparts'.

Interdisciplinary discourses including neuroscience and arts-based learning also smooth the way into unusual experiential activities. Participants may be asked to suspend judgment as they enter terrain that may be unfamiliar, given that the activity derives from neuro-scientific research and new insights into multiple intelligences. References may be made to the vast body of arts-based work that has been successfully applied in a wide range of social contexts (Goldbard 2006). Given that negotiation often involves achieving mutually acceptable outcomes across cultural and worldview differences, the utility of arts to engage negotiators across differences and productively stimulate imagination and intuition can be emphasized (LeBaron and Honeyman 2006). As educators push themselves to be

inventive and try new strategies to foster learning, everyone benefits.

Dialogue and collaboration with community artists and others working in creative media can also be helpful in expanding training repertoires. Invite a mime artist to lead experiences related to nonverbal communication. Ask a visual artist to talk about what she learned about intercultural negotiation from a collective mural project. This kind of dialogue can generate useful and "out of the box" ideas, as a group of colleagues found when we staged an evening dialogue between community artists and conflict resolution practitioners (LeBaron and Honeyman 2006).

Karl Attard suggests that trainers and facilitators engage in their own reflective practice by keeping a journal themselves (Attard 2008). His research indicates that self-reflection captured in journal narratives can help reveal the layers of complexity involved in teaching. He also normalizes the uncertainty that is often experienced when moving into new experiences, by arguing that uncertainty may be a constant companion for those engaged in life-long learning and development of their craft. Therefore, the advice for those feeling a little anxious about stepping into unknown teaching and learning experiences is 1) to be reassured by the certainty that we are all feeling uncertain; and 2) to engage in some form of structured self-reflection as a basis for self-development.

Recommendations for How to Approach Role-Plays

Despite the dramatic implications of the title of this paper, we have good news: reports of the death of the role-play have been exaggerated. Role-plays will survive for a long time; they are so inculcated into the culture of negotiation training that even empirical studies impugning their value may take time to dislodge them. However, as a training method, role-plays require some serious resuscitating and invigorating. We offer the following suggestions about ways to improve design and implementation of, and follow up with, role-plays in negotiation trainings:

1) Give students the opportunity to design role-plays for other students to play, and then reverse the roles of designers and players.
2) Design role-plays that resist the temptation to dramatic excess – while the plot may sparkle, its utility may be diminished.
3) Design role-plays that are as close to real life as possible, drawing on composites of actual scenarios or real issues so that the simulation has an air of authenticity. Consider using real situations that are close, but not identical, to con-

texts and situations experienced by participants in the wider world. Do so with an awareness of the pitfalls of participants being swallowed up by emotional triggers related to these contexts.

4) Add reality to role-plays, putting tangible resources, such as money or chocolate, at stake.
5) Design role-plays with specific learning objectives, such as particular skills. All role-plays are not equal, and they have different functions. Identify these during the design phase, and be prepared to articulate the objectives to participants in advance of using the role-play.
6) Precede role-play activities with work on cultural fluency so that participants are attuned to the dangers and boundaries of stereotyping.
7) Assign participants roles that do not involve playing ethnocultural identities different from their own. Explore this aspect of cultural difference using alternative experiential activities.
8) Frame role-play activities with clear learning orientations that include incremental markers rather than focusing primarily on outcomes.
9) Provide time for students to engage in conceptual background learning about a topic before engaging in role-play simulation (Druckman and Robinson 1998).
10) Spend time preparing participants to role-play. Model ways of overplaying and underplaying roles. Discuss the purpose of role-play activities, and ask participants to strike a balance between over-identification with and disconnection from roles. Caution against drawing on cultural stereotypes to inform roles.
11) Encourage improvisation in role-playing rather than literal adherence to a script, so that participants draw on their own experience and behave as they would themselves, given the context. This will enhance the realism of the experience.
12) Assign participants roles that have resonance for them. This does not mean that participants must be assigned roles like those they play in real life. A manager need not always be a manager nor a front line worker always a front line worker. Resonance can exist quite outside someone's real life role. A lawyer may have strong resonance with a character who is a dancer; a police officer may experience a desire to play a politician. Take advantage of the benefits of role-plays in giving participants the opportunity to take others' perspectives.

13) When people play roles with which they are familiar, more useful portrayals may result. Managers can learn a great deal by playing line workers. Police officers may be surprised by an experience of playing unemployed youth. Take advantage of roles that participants may know through interaction, but not from inside another's moccasins.
14) Give careful instructions about the objectives of the role-play activity, and ensure that coaches or instructors are plentiful enough to monitor the dynamics of each group. Intervene if people are getting off the rails in terms of focus or fidelity to the roles.
15) Balance a spirit of play with an air of seriousness about the role-play activity. Emphasize the particular learning objectives related to the role-play in advance of its unfolding. Question whether deception is necessary in implementing a role-play. It may work better when participants know the objectives.
16) Provide coaching *in situ* for role-players if possible (Van Hassalt, Romano, and Vecchi 2008).
17) Debrief specifically and completely. Resist the tendency to relegate debriefing to an afterthought or a rushed invitation for general comments.
18) Create space for structured and unstructured reflection. For example, give participants assignments to monitor their application of specific skills practiced in role-plays in actual situations. Have them keep negotiation journals, give peer feedback and report their insights.
19) Provide students with meaningful, specific and constructive feedback.
20) Follow up with exploration of applications, and design follow-up learning activities to assist with integrating those concepts, skills and capacities that are difficult to implement.
21) Consider using demonstration role-plays or fishbowl formats where trainers or actors depict roles that participants can analyze and respond to.

Revisiting the Ambushed Student

We opened this reflective journey with the true story of the ambushed student. Now that we have reached the end (or is it the beginning?), let's imagine what she might have said after a different type of learning experience.

I'm really looking forward to learning more about my own negotiating behavior in this workshop, offered the student.

That's great to hear, responded the facilitator. *Is there anything in particular – any behavior or skill – that you are thinking about*?

She thinks for a moment, *Yes. I've noticed in the past that I get impatient really quickly. So once I think I know what the other negotiator is going to say, I get distracted and start looking around the room and things like that*.

Hmmm. The facilitator is curious. *How have others responded to that?*

Well, the student explains, *when we have done graphic reflections before – drawing on flip chart paper, you know – it has come out that the other negotiators think I am not interested in them or what they have to say. They feel not listened to, which is pretty frustrating for them, I guess.*

And how is it then for you? probes the facilitator.

The student laughs. *Pretty much the same. We did this thing once bargaining for chocolate. I wanted that chocolate badly and I got so frustrated that I nearly stole it from the other team. They had started out friendly but then we all somehow slipped into adversarial mode.*

The facilitator checks that she has understood. *It sounds like you would appreciate some more learning experiences to explore your negotiating behavior in these types of situations.*

The student nods: *I would love to get some feedback on this and other aspects of my negotiating behavior. After all, that's why I'm here.*

Thank you. The facilitator turns to another student: *And what's brought you here today*?

Conclusion

In this paper we have argued that trainers can enhance student learning experiences in negotiation training by drawing on interdisciplinary insights offered by the physical and social sciences such as neuroscience, experiential learning, psychology, various therapies and arts, music and aesthetics. Applying these insights to training design and implementation is important, even essential, to future educational effectiveness.

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