

# Simulation: A Tool for Inservice Education

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A major criticism of inservice education is that teachers are "passive pawns" who merely receive information that trainers deliver (Arends, 1978). Simulation, used since the 60s to involve students in active learning, is a successful technique for training teachers, too.

Pierfy (1977) notes that simulation generates more interest in subject matter than conventional methods, results in better retention of information, and changes attitudes. The impact on attitudes is particularly relevant for teacher trainers since lack of attention to teacher attitude change has resulted in the failure of many curriculum innovations. Training methods for skills such as prescriptive teaching, positive reinforcement, and classroom management can be easily identified. Changing attitudes is more complex.

How can simulation research findings be applied to the local inservice situation? Two methods are available. Commercial simulations that meet your particular goals can be purchased or simulations can be locally developed. Simulation design is a simple, four-part process. The design of each part—Goals, Scenario, Roles, and Rules—is described here and the entire process is illustrated by an example of a simulation game design, *Choices*.

## 1. Goals. Why are we doing this?

Goals should be clearly defined and stated. Without clear goals, a simulation is simply a game. While it might be fun for the participants, the teaching value is questionable. If the goal is to change attitudes, the

desired outcomes should be stated in the introduction.

## 2. Scenario. Where does this occur?

The scenario should be an accurate, realistic interpretation of the actual situation. The game designer needs first-hand information about the setting. For example, if teachers are being trained to function in a new classroom or a different ethnic or cultural environment, the simulated environment must be as similar to the real environment as possible. The idea is for the teachers to get over their "culture shock" before they are placed in the new environment. If the scenario is not accurate, its validity as a training technique is questionable.

## 3. Roles. Who do the players represent?

This is one of the fun parts of simulation design. The roles can be presented with as much or as little elaboration as possible. The more detail given to players about their roles, the more structured the play and interaction become. The less detail, the more the individual players can embellish their roles. Some people are better at role play than others and audience characteristics should be considered when developing the roles. The method of simulation will also affect role design. Will the players use a game board, an actual or contrived environment, or will the scenario be totally imagined? A highly structured scenario can use less structured roles.

## 4. Rules. How is the game organized?

Along with scenario and roles, rules give structure to the simulation. They can range from simple to complex. Rules should be clearly stated to avoid the need for interpretation. A few clearly stated rules make the trainers' job easier and increase the

transportability and reliability of the game. The rules will also contain the criteria for success. How will the winner be determined?

## Choices—A Locally Designed Simulation

One simulation, *Choices*, can be described in terms of the design process of goals, scenario, roles, and rules. It was designed as part of a workshop to prepare public school personnel to work with parents. It is often difficult for public school personnel to make the transition from a controlled environment (a classroom) to a natural environment where many independent forces operate. *Choices* helps participants bridge that gap and examine their attitudes toward low-income populations.

*Choices* was designed to sensitize teachers to their students' homes and community. Another focus was the need for teachers to restrain from imposing their values on their students.

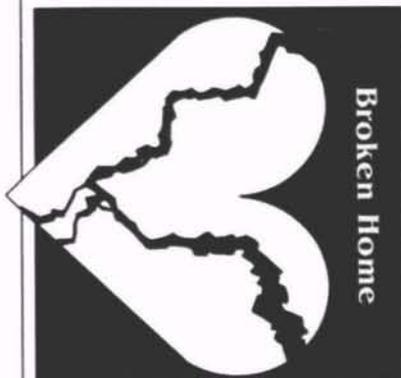
*Choices* is designed to simulate a rural, low-income setting. The game board represents the day-to-day situation of this population. The object of the game is to get through the month (30 spaces, each representing one day) first, with no problems. Rolling dice moves players through the squares and players draw cards every time they land on a square. The cards represent social and financial problems and contribute to the scenario. Players can accumulate problems or try to solve them before taking another turn. Thus, the players must exercise some strategy in setting priorities.

*Choices* presents roles as family profiles. Players are randomly assigned a role and are given multiple family characteristics which cause them to react uniquely to problem

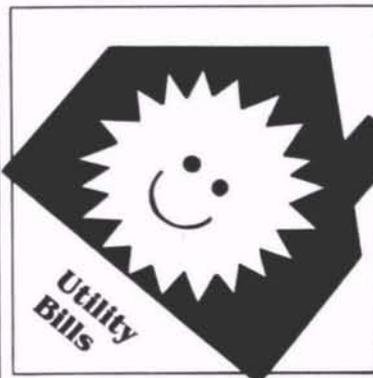
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Research shows that simulation is more interesting than conventional methods, results in better retention, and changes attitudes.



★  
★ Roll the dice to move your player through the squares. Every time you land on a square, draw a card. The cards represent social and financial problems. You may accumulate the problems or try to solve them before moving on to a new square. ★



situations they encounter. The interaction among the roles is also an important part of *Choices*; players provide or withhold support to each other by their role definition.

*Choices* contains a two-page list of rules and instructions. The rules specify what the players may or may not do with their problems and situations. A list of discussion questions is included to be used after the game is over. This part is often called "debriefing" and gives participants a chance to clarify their feelings and attitudes about the experience. The trainer should use this discussion to reinforce the concepts and goals of the simulation and assist participants in making the transference to the "real world." The rules and instructions enable the entire kit to be used as a self-contained workshop.

Simulation is an appropriate technique for inservice education; it can reduce many of the complaints teachers currently have about inservice practices. Current research on simulations lends credibility to their usefulness as a training technique for adults. ■

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### Themes of Educational Leadership in 1981-82

Present plans call for the following theme issues of Educational Leadership in 1981-82:

Month	Theme	Including	Deadline for Manuscripts
October	Thinking and Learning	Teaching thinking skills, brain research, development of intelligence, recent learning theory.	June 1, 1981
December	Taking Stock of Your School	Self-assessment of goals, organization, instructional program, school climate, provisions for supervision, community relations.	August 1, 1981
February	Training for Leadership	Leader behavior; selection, training, supervision, and evaluation of administrators.	October 1, 1981
March	Education in Other Nations	Descriptions of developments in other countries—especially curriculum and supervision—relevant to U.S. education.	November 1, 1981

Themes of other issues (November, January, April, May) will be determined at the time of publication. We often group several unsolicited manuscripts together when they are on similar topics. All issues also include non-theme articles, so manuscripts on any aspect of curriculum, instruction, supervision, and leadership in education are always welcome.

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