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SISINE: Teaching Negotiation Through a Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game

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Abstract. Trainers have used role-playing games to teach negotiation skills for a long time. In traditional practice, learners in a small group “act out” the roles assigned by the trainer. The SISINE Project (www.SISINE.net) – funded by the EU Leonardo Program - has developed a teaching methodology making it possible to conduct this kind of role playing game at a distance. The teaching methodology exploits a specially-developed technology platform allowing a small community of players to communicate, interact and play online. The current beta version supports up to twenty simultaneous players, represented by avatars. Communication among players is based on short text messages displayed in bubble cartoons above the avatars’ heads. Special controls allow players to control the avatars’ movements, gestures and facial expressions. This way, the community can communicate, interact and play online. The platform provides the normal functionality expected by players of Multiplayer On-line Role-Playing Games (MORPG) as well as special functions allowing a trainer to set up games, intervene during game play, record specific phases of a game, annotate recordings and discuss them with the players. Since January 2007, the SISINE project has been testing its platform and methodology in

Poland, Slovakia and Italy. In Poland the experimental group consists of company sales representatives; in Slovakia of managers in NGOs; In Italy of teachers. The testing is still in progress. In each case, the group uses a custom-designed virtual environment to practice specific forms of negotiation: commercial negotiation (in Poland), negotiation in human resources management (Slovakia) and intercultural negotiation (Italy). In all cases, SISINE helps learners to acquire basic notions and rules about negotiation and, more importantly, practical know-how on how to apply this knowledge.

Keywords: Role games, negotiation, vocational training, MORPG