

2023

## Practice Makes Progress: Using the Lifespan Course as an Example for Role-Play Implementation

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### Recommended Citation

Horton, E., & Jacobs, E. (2023). Practice Makes Progress: Using the Lifespan Course as an Example for Role-Play Implementation. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 17(2). Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/jcps/vol17/iss2/5>

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## Practice Makes Progress: Using the Lifespan Course as an Example for Role-Play Implementation

### Abstract

This conceptual article addresses specific clinical and practical implications for the utilization of role-play in the human growth and development course. Specific approaches to integrating role-play into the human growth and development course, including what we coin as *Structured Role-Play*, *Semi-Structured Role-Play*, and *Unstructured Role-Play* implementation strategies, are discussed at length. Sample vignettes and experiential activities for each developmental stage are provided. Finally, we address ethical considerations regarding role-play implementation.

### Keywords

role-play, human growth and development, counselor education, creative pedagogy, experiential learning

In a content analysis including 230 peer-reviewed articles regarding teaching and learning published in journals of the American Counseling Association and its divisions, only one article included attention to human growth and development course (Barrio Minton et al., 2014). Since 2014, the lack of articles on human growth and development continues. Thus, counselor education literature would benefit from additional research on ways in which to teach the human growth and development course in a way that aligns with the professional identity of counselors. Integrating role-play into the human growth and development course tactfully and purposefully appears to be a potential bridge to promote students' confidence with regard to counseling clients across the lifespan.

While history, theory, and research related to human growth and development is important, counselor educators can use role-play to emphasize practitioner techniques and skills for supporting clients across the lifespan (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2016). For counselors, the human growth and development course needs to extend beyond theories to applying these foundations as future mental health professionals (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2016). In a study investigating the use of role-play in counselor education, several courses, including the human growth and development course, were not referenced as including role-play by any of the student participants (Horton, 2021). Recurrently, the research emphasizes the value of role-play (Horton et al, 2022), yet the literature only speaks to its utility in certain courses (e.g., counseling skills; Crowe, 2014). Counselor educators need to know how to effectively integrate role-play into diverse, non-traditional classes, such as the human growth and development course. Particularly, because the human growth and development course is reported as needing refinement to align with the professional identity of clinical mental health counselors (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2016). We postulate that integrating role-play into the human growth and development course tactfully and

purposefully promotes students' autonomy and confidence with regard to counseling skills. In this article, we (a) review the literature on role-play in counselor education, (b) describe specific approaches to integrating role-play into the human growth and development course, and (c) address ethical considerations.

### **Role-Play in Counselor Education**

The value of role-play is documented, though scant and inconsistent, in the literature. Using role-play as a pedagogical technique provides students with opportunities to advance their understanding of counseling through multiple domains of Bloom's taxonomy, from the cognitive to the affective to the psychomotor (Bloom et al., 1956; Kolb, 1984; Rao & Stupans, 2012). Krathwohl (2002) highlighted the updated version of Bloom's Taxonomy, encompassing six major categories classifying educational learning objectives into levels of complexity and specificity: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. As one progresses in the cognitive domains identified in the revised Bloom's taxonomy, deeper, longer lasting learning processes occur (Krathwohl, 2002). While standard didactic lecture-and-discussion approaches to counselor education may solely reach the lower cognitive domains (e.g., remembering and understanding), role-play facilitates opportunities for higher cognitive domains, including applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Krathwohl, 2002). Further, experiential learning, of which role-play constitutes, views learning as a process, rather than solely the acquisition and recall of material, and conceptualizes learning as a continuous process grounded in experience (Dewey, 1933).

Role-playing is a pedagogical technique used by counselor educators to provide counseling students the opportunity to practice a variety of counseling skills and theories. Role-playing a counseling session in an education setting allows students to practice skills, without the risk that

may be present when counseling real clients (Barney & Shea, 2007; Browning et al., 2005; Hinkle & Dean, 2017). Numerous benefits prevail for counselors-in-training (CITs) engaging in regular role-play, including increasing confidence, decreasing anxiety, increased self-awareness, and skill improvement at large (Horton et al., 2022; Kozina et al., 2010; Matson, 1991; Tang et al., 2004).

Through the implementation of role-play in counselor student development, students have the opportunity to play the role of counselor, client, and observer. All roles foster opportunity for different perspectives and related growth, interpersonally and intrapersonally (Mariska, 2015; Young & Hundley, 2012). Based on logistics, students may be observing other students in the role of counselor and client at times as well, which also produces insights and awareness. When observing, students can contemplate what they might say or do differently, in addition to having the opportunity to gain different points of view on other ways to handle the client's presenting issue (Horton et al., 2022; Wells & Dickens, 2019). When in any of these roles, role-play enhances students' reflective processes (Young & Hundley, 2012).

Counselors-in-training emphasize the impact that experiential practices, including role-play, had on their confidence and their clinical skills (Horton, 2021). Creative, experiential learning and teaching practice seems to help alleviate anxiety that hinders counselors-in-training as well as the clients they will serve. Role-plays serve as an effective way to build overall counseling skills, as noted by both instructor ratings and self-ratings (Osborn & Costas, 2013). Similarly, across the literature, subjective reports and objective assessments of knowledge retention indicate that role-play simulation is an effective teaching technique (DeNeve & Heppner, 1997). Although the existing literature denotes the value of role-play in counselor education, the successful implementation of role-play in the classroom, especially in the human growth and development course, does not yet exist. We hope to add to the literature by providing unique, clear

strategies for the utilization of role-play as a pedagogical technique in the human growth and development course.

### **Rationale for Role-Play in the Classroom**

The literature notes the commonality of passive learning formats, where the students sit and listen to a lecture or watch a video, with occasional discussion (Gazzola et al., 2017). This format can be effective for learning cognitively, but research has shown that it does not result in improved clinical skills nor client outcomes (Taylor & Neimeyer, 2015). Often, key components of skill acquisition, specifically the repetitive practice of counseling skills, personalized performance feedback, and follow-up skill assessment and refinement are lacking (Tracey et al., 2014). Rousmaniere (2016) highlights that deliberate practice is crucial for practitioners. Further, Rousmaniere (2016) notes that training opportunities emphasizing active learning methods, specifically repetitively practicing skills through role-play or simulation, as being more profound than passively listening to a lecture or watching a video. Simulation-based behavioral rehearsal facilitates state-dependent learning and helps move skills into procedural memory (McGaghie & Kristopaitis, 2015). Rousmaniere (2016) posits that the best learning formats are role-plays that try to closely match the conditions of future counseling sessions. Per Ericsson and Pool (2016), “The most effective forms of practice are doing more than helping you learn to play a musical instrument; they are actually increasing your ability to play” (p. 43). Counselors-in-training can read a plethora of books and articles on the profession of counseling, but when they have a client in front of them, not be familiar with how to counsel. While still having the support of the classroom, counselors-in-training can be bold and experimental in their approach, to find out what works and what does not (Horton, 2021). By doing so in role-play sessions, students gain clarity and understanding of their professional identity as a counselor (Horton et al., 2022).

### **Implementation Strategies for Role-Play in Counselor Education**

Role-play can be used across counseling curriculum, including the human growth and development course. Individual investigations assert the value of role-play in teaching various individual courses, suggesting that the literature supports the notion of role-play's integration throughout curriculum. These studies include but are not limited to role-play's efficacy in teaching family counseling (Horton et al., 2022; Browning et al., 2005; Shurts et al., 2006) and group counseling (Shumaker et al., 2011). Various counseling courses can be designed and orchestrated in a manner that utilizes role-play consistently. Structuring courses as such fosters the previously mentioned benefits of experiential learning (Kozina et al., 2010; Matson, 1991; Tang et al., 2004). The more that the students practice counseling, the better they will get at counseling and in turn, the more comfortable they will be when they begin to see clients in practicum (Horton, 2021). In the following sections, we provide definitions and examples of three various role-play implementation strategies.

#### **Structured Role-Play**

The utilization of role-play in counselor education requires careful planning, classroom management, and structure. There are various ways in which a counselor educator can implement role-play in the training of counselors, some with specific instructions and expectations from the instructor, which we refer to as *Structured Role-Play*. *Structured Role-Play* can take on a variety of forms, but each entails a set of guidelines regarding what is to be role-played.

#### ***Practicing a Particular Skill***

Demonstrating various counseling skills to counselors-in-training, as a means of allowing concepts described in textbooks to come to life is integral to counselor education. Further, sometimes following professor demonstrations, students are asked to replicate said demonstrations

as a means of practicing the particular skill being discussed in class that day. For example, if the professor demonstrates the use of clarification and summarization with an adolescent, students are then asked to practice the same skill in pairs using the same or similar content demonstrated by the professor. Frequently, we spend time discussing a particular skill, intervention, or theory, and then ask the students to role-play a specific problem, in order for their partner to practice the topic for that class. Following such, the counselor educator facilitates sufficient discussion on the topic.

### ***Role-playing a Particular Case***

In this type of *Structured Role-Play*, the ‘client’ role player is paired with another student, who will act as the counselor. The ‘client’ role player is given a brief case vignette that they are expected to role-play. For example, the professor describes a client, Suzie, presenting as a 49-year-old woman who is struggling to decide if she should put her aging mother in an assisted living home or offer her mother care herself. Student A role-plays Suzie. Student B practices counseling Student A. Given that all students are practicing the same case, small group discussion following the role-play can center on the various techniques and interventions that were tried, similarities in choices, and different vantage points with regard to treatment.

### ***Role-play Based on a Video***

Similar to the role-play of a specific case, a counselor educator may choose to show a brief video showcasing a client dynamic, as a manner of clearly relaying the client’s experiences to the role-player who will act out the client’s experience. To illustrate, we utilize brief video clips from the popular television show, *This Is Us*, to showcase a particular client issue (e.g., a young girl being bullied at the pool because of her weight; Fogelman, 2022). After showing the clip, the professor instructs Student A to assume the role of the young girl from the clip, and Student B attempts to counsel Student A. Then, the students switch roles. The value of using a video is that



the role-player gets to see his or her role, as opposed to just reading about it. At times, this visualization helps the ‘client’ role-player act more realistically, which fosters deeper learning for both students.

### ***Benefits of Structured Role-Play***

There are a multitude of benefits associated with the utilization of *Structured Role-Play* in counselor training programs. One of the primary benefits associated with *Structured Role-Play* is that the structure provides less room for ambiguity and uncertainty, which facilitates greater opportunity for the students to utilize the skill, intervention, or theory being addressed. In beginning counseling classes, if students are asked to role-play a client, they often make it too simple or completely impossible, which results in frustration on the part of the student-counselor. Subsequently, this approach to role-play in counselor education is ideal for the beginning of counseling courses, namely the first classes of the semester, as it helps get students acclimated and comfortable with the experience of role-playing counseling scenarios. Doing so accustoms students to the experience of what it is like to be a counselor and, in turn, lessens the fear and trepidation that frequently presents when seeing real clients. In addition, *Structured Role-Play* is time efficient, in that the professor can set up the role-play so that the counselor can ‘get right to business’ and practice the specific directive given (e.g., reflecting emotions, letting a client talk about their grief, interjecting when a client is rambling). If left unstructured, it may take the counselor 10 to 15 minutes to get to the skill that was intended to be practiced, and often, there is not enough time in class for this.

### **Semi-Structured Role-Play**

*Semi-Structured Role-Play* is the ‘middle ground’ type of role-play in that it still employs a degree of structure and directives, but it allows the students some choice in the details of the role-

play. An example of a *Semi-Structured Role-Play* directive is: “Please get with your assigned partner. Number off one or two in your pair. Number one will start by being the counselor and number two will be the client. Those of you who are role-playing the client, play a role that lends itself to dealing with Erikson’s psychosocial stage of Identity vs. Isolation. When implementing *Semi-Structured Role-Play*, it is integral that the counselor educator gives adequate direction to what kind of issue should be presented, but not detail specifics in regard to what the role-play should be. At times, the instructions related to this type of role-play may be what not to present in the role of the client based on the scope of the class.

*Semi-Structured Role-Play* lends itself to the applied counseling courses wherein role-play is not used as frequently, such as the human growth and development course. Due to the pervasiveness of complex presenting issues being taught in these courses, students ideally should get a chance to role-play counseling clients in each developmental stage). The professor may ask students to role-play various common situations relevant to the various ages and stages, in order to gain experience in working with clients in each developmental stage.

### **Unstructured Role-Play**

Unlike *Structured Role-Play*, *Unstructured Role-Play* entails freedom on the part of the role-player to act out any issue they choose. *Unstructured Role-Play* more closely parallels the experience counselors have with clients, in that the majority of the time, counselors do not entirely know what to expect upon meeting with a client. *Unstructured Role-Play* can be used toward the end of the semester after students have gained knowledge, skill, and comfort role-playing. Also, by the end of the semester, students are often able to role-play more compelling roles since they have seen and heard many cases relevant to the purpose of the course.

When instructors utilize *Unstructured Role-Play* in counselor education, they utilize vague, open directives when students are pairing up to role-play and practice. An example of a simple, open instruction may be: “Please pair up with your assigned partner for the experiential portion of today’s class. Today, when you are the ‘client,’ you have freedom and flexibility to role-play any issue that comes to mind that is relevant to this course. When you are the ‘counselor,’ your role is to be as helpful as possible using what you have learned from this class.” When implementing *Unstructured Role-Play*, the counselor educator should employ minimal guides for the role. Often, the role-player plays something that is or was personal for them or someone they know.

### ***Additional Considerations of Unstructured Role-Play***

The opportunity for counselors-in-training to role-play without any preconceived thoughts on what will ensue in the ‘session’ can be beneficial in preparing counselors for the ambiguity of counseling, and accordingly, there are additional considerations for counselor educators. For example, counselor educators may consider that students role-playing the client may not portray a client realistically. The literature supports this notion with role-play at large, highlighting that co-student role-players regularly ‘go easy on’ their peers and try to help the ‘counselor’ out through providing epiphanies that clients would not come to as readily (Clarke et al., 2017). Counselor educators can consider the developmental stage of their students and consider adjusting the role-play as appropriate to align with the developmental needs of the class (Horton, 2021). In addition, the literature highlights other considerations of general role-play, noting the potential distress for counseling students portraying clients and the poor quality of acting that can result in challenges for the counselor in the role-play (Hodgson et al., 2007; Rapisarda et al., 2011). Moreover, counseling students may play simple roles, directly correlating to their developmental experiences. Often, students role-play issues such as breakups, but neglect to role-play more complex, pervasive

issues in the counseling field, such as grief, issues with work and money, or difficult issues related to culture and religion. That said, *Structured Role-Play* can, at times, be more appropriate for various elements of counselor education, due to student naivety of presenting problems that manifest in real-world counseling settings.

### **Role-Play in Applied Counseling Courses**

Counselor educators can use the three types of role-play, *Structured Role-Play*, *Semi-Structured Role-Play*, and *Unstructured Role-Play*, in applied counseling courses, including the human growth and development course. In this section, we discuss more in-depth approaches to use role-play across developmental stages. While not an exhaustive list of ways role-play pedagogical techniques can be used, the following is meant to spark ideas and creativity within counselor educators across developmental stages.

#### **Infancy (0 to 2 years)**

In conjunction with teaching about the developmental theories related to human growth, behavior, and functioning, counselor educators can tie in role-plays related to the first developmental stage: 0 to 2 years. When discussing counseling across the lifespan specific to 0 to 2, educators can discuss how to support caregivers raising young children. Using *Structured Role-Play*, the counselor educator can use clips from the film *A Mouthful of Air*. This film demonstrates the impact of post-partum depression on the family system (Koppleman, 2021). The counselor educator would pair up the students and walk them through role-playing two characters from the film, Julie, mother experiencing post-partum depression, and her husband, Ethan. The educator shows heartwrenching clips of the pain and suicidal ideation Julie is experiencing while caring for her newborn. First, Student A role-plays as Julie, the client, while Student B role-plays as the counselor. Then, the students switch roles. The educator shows another clip focusing on Ethan,

where he is frustrated asking Julie if she took her medicine after her suicide attempt. Then, Student A counsels Student B, role-playing as Ethan. The video clips provide students the creative inspiration to draw on heavy feelings that they might not otherwise role-play without this structure. Following, the counselor educator can invite the students to quietly reflect and anonymously post their reflection on a discussion board. Questions that the students can reflect upon include: (a) What came up for you? (b) What did you learn? and (c) What do you want to think or learn more about as a result of the exposure?

### **Early Childhood (2 to 6 years)**

Role-playing a specific case is another type of *Structured Role-Play* that can seamlessly fit within the human growth and development course. Educators could offer the following vignette to students wherein caregivers of a young child are worried that they are “doing it wrong.” A sample vignette is as follows:

Cassandra and her partner, Amari, are coming to you for counseling. They are first-time parents. They adopted a child one year ago, who is now 4 years old. He has been getting in trouble at pre-school for throwing things, kicking others, and name-calling. The pre-school has mentioned the prospect of no longer being able to have their son at the school due to his behavior. They ask you: (a) Is this normal? (b) Are we doing something wrong? (c) Should we be doing something differently?

Educators could implement this *Structured Role-Play* using a fishbowl approach (Bayne & Jangha, 2016). The fishbowl exercise allows the entire class to contribute and try the mock counseling experience (Bayne & Jangha, 2016). The instructor takes on the role of a client and asks a student to volunteer as the other partner. Then, the educator sits opposite the first student role-playing as the counselor for a simulated session. As the faux session progresses, the rest of the class observes

and can switch places with their peer by saying “Freeze” when they would like to volunteer to counsel the clients (Bayne & Jangha, 2016). This role-play gives students the opportunity to consider how to be of support to clients who have developmentally-related questions and concerns.

### **Middle Childhood (6 to 11 years)**

Some students seem to have difficulty realistically acting out clients, particularly children. Thus, showing clips from a show to capture an example of emotional experiences with children gives counselors-in-training the space to empathize with the developmental crises of childhood as well as tailor their counseling approach in a developmentally appropriate manner. To illustrate, when discussing middle childhood, the educator can pull two pop culture clips that gave the students roles to enact. First, the instructor invites the counseling students to pair up with a peer that they wanted to get to know better. Then, the counselor educator shows a short clip from the television show, *This is Us* (Fogleman, 2022). This clip shows an emotional struggle for 8-year-old Randall, as he was navigating mental health difficulties related to his identity following an interracial adoption. Student A then role-plays as the “client” (Randall) while Student B role-plays as the “counselor.” During this role-play, the students are instructed to build rapport with the “client” (Randall) and consider developmental theories. Following, students discuss their thoughts and reactions – specific to the developmental process and how it shows up “in the real world” for counselors. Following, the instructor shows a clip from the film *Turning Red* (Shi, 2022). This clip showcases puberty and related developmental and mental health implications for 11-year-old Mei, a Chinese-Canadian preteen (Shi, 2022). After viewing the clip, the students switch roles. Student A then role-plays as the counselor while Student B role-plays as the “client” (Mei). Similarly, the students process the role-play within their pairs. Last, the class comes back for a large group discussion of both role-plays, specific to the human growth and development process.

**Adolescence (11 to 18 years)**

Role-play can take on numerous formats, including watching sample role-plays (Horton et al., 2022). Thus, the counselor educator can also play sample counseling sessions with colleagues in the field. Before showing these clips, the educator can ‘mix up’ the class and pair students. Then, the educator can invite the students to ‘whisper during the movie’ while the role-plays are showed. ‘Whispering during the movie’ is akin to how some people choose to whisper when watching a film together about how the film is transpiring. Students can process their thoughts in vivo with their peer this way. For example, we recorded two role-play sessions for adolescence; the first showcased a counselor supporting an adolescent from a religious family who wants to get a chest binder and is exploring their gender identity and the second demonstrated a parent consultation session. After each role-play, the counselor talked through how counselors can consider developmental concepts ‘in the real world.’

**Emerging Adulthood (18 to 25 years)**

Counselor educators could use the following vignette to help students discuss the developmental issues connected to identity, including Marcia’s four identity statuses. The vignette provides space to discuss the developmental process of switching from moratorium to achievement, moratorium to achievement, as some clients do throughout their careers.

Nick is a 25-year-old, multiracial (Italian and Hispanic) man coming to you for counseling. He has spent most of his life in New York City but now resides here in Houston. Nick moved here in pursuit of his master’s degree. Until this year, Nick has spent his entire adult life serving in the military. At the age of 18, Nick attended a renowned military school, and accordingly, became a high-ranking officer at a young age. He did two tours, where he led groups of young men and women through dangerous circumstances. In doing so, Nick lost

several dear friends of his, people that he was in charge of in his platoon. In turn, he feels immense guilt and responsibility for those losses. After many years of service, Nick decided he could not do it anymore and got out of the military. Many of his loved ones thought this was a ludicrous choice. Nick doubts this choice, too, and wonders if it was the right move. Now, Nick is coming to you because he feels like life “won’t stop throwing him curveballs.” He has never been to counseling and reports having a hard time with “emotional stuff,” feeling as though his time in the military taught him to suppress his emotions. Three months before coming to counseling, his mother died of ALS. The week before coming to see you, Nick found out that his younger brother overdosed and died. Two days prior to coming to see you, Nick found out his girlfriend of only five months is pregnant. He doesn’t know how to handle everything and is hoping counseling will help.

The educator could ask the students to get in groups of three, by numbering off. Then, the students would rotate being counselor, client, or observer, with each student getting roughly five minutes in each role before switching. The session would continue where they left off, all switching role-playing Nick. The small groups would process then come together for a large group discussion.

### **Middle Adulthood (25 to 65 years)**

A potential case vignette that counselor educators could invite their students to role-play for middle adulthood is as follows:

Lucia is a 47-year-old Cisgender Latina female who recently separated from her husband. Lucia has three adult children, the youngest of whom has recently moved out of the home to pursue college. Lucia lost her middle son due to gang violence; he was tragically murdered three years ago. Lucia is finding herself more involved in her aging father's care. Lucia spent most of her adult life as a homemaker and stay-at-home mom for her three



children while her husband worked as an electrician. She always dreamed of becoming a teacher and having a positive impact on young children's lives but married at 18 and had her first daughter at 19. She describes her life of being a wife and mom as "mostly happy" though sometimes she would wonder how her life could have been different if she chose a different path and pursued her interest in teaching. She is reluctant to come to counseling but is trying it due to feeling lonely and ostracized from her go-to support system, her Catholic church, following them hearing the news of her pending divorce.

In their pairs, the students could reflect on the following questions: (a) What stages of psychosocial development (i.e., Erikson's stages) might this client be in? (b) How does this person's developmental stage impact their mental health? (c) What other contextual factors (e.g., culture, generation, gender) are at play here? and (d) What came up for you (e.g., personally, as the counselor, as the client) while role-playing?

### **Late Adulthood (65 years and older)**

For the late adulthood developmental stage, educators can use the following case vignette: Fatima is a 76-year-old cisgender Pakistani woman. She is coming to counseling because she fears that she is "depressed" again. She has done counseling before, and learned some of her warning signs for her depression in previous counseling. She finds that she is not leaving the house. She is not engaging in any of her hobbies that used to bring her joy, including playing the organ or piano, gardening, painting, and volunteering to read for the children at the library. Her partner of 50 years died 2 years ago, and Fatima said she hasn't had the same zest for life since that loss. Fatima also shared that her only daughter has recently been diagnosed with cancer. She fears that she is going to lose her daughter as well. Fatima feels "stupid" for not being able to "just get" herself out of bed, to shower, to

clean her home, to pay her bills, etc. She has enough money to pay the bills, but “is stupid” and doesn’t have the energy to call to pay the bills. Fatima shares that the “only” thing bringing her joy that she is keeping up with is taking care of her cats.

The counselor educator can pair up students and ask them to decide who is playing the client first. With this role-play, the instructor can pull all of the ‘clients’ out of the room to tell them about the case. Counselors will be experiencing something much like real counseling, wherein they don’t have a case vignette to think about, but rather, need to practice actively listening. ‘Clients’ would be instructed to walk into the session and start with ‘Oh wow, you are much younger than I thought you would be’ to give the ‘counselors’ the opportunity to practice how to navigate a client commenting on their personal features. Following, the pairs and large group would discuss reflective questions: (a) Think developmental processes. What makes counseling this client different than clients at other developmental stages? (b) What came up for you as you considered context and culture while counseling Fatima? and (c) What else came up for you personally or professionally during this role-play?

### **Unstructured Developmental Role-Play**

During the last class of the semester, the instructor can integrate *Unstructured Role-Play* via inviting the students to practice counseling various clients across the lifespan. In this *Unstructured Role-Play*, the CITs can practice counseling diverse clients in various developmental stages and process how the content from the course can present in sessions. The educator could ask the students to get in groups of three and decide amongst themselves who will be the ‘counselor,’ who will be the ‘client,’ and who will be the ‘observer’ first. All of the students will play all three roles. The ‘client’ will role-play an individual at any developmental age and stage, giving a brief description (e.g., what age and other needed contextual factors) to the group before

beginning the role-play. The observer will take notes and offer feedback and ask the group reflective questions about the role-play (e.g., what developmental concepts did we notice during this role-play?) The counselor's goal is to practice active listening and try to be helpful with their developmental stressors. Then, the group will switch roles. The students will experience each role. The 'client' will role-play a different individual at a different developmental stage. The counselor's and observer's goals remain the same. Last, the students will assume the role that they have not practiced yet. Again, the 'client' will role-play a third client, navigating a unique developmental issue. After the three role-plays, the group will discuss, compare, and contrast the 'clients,' including discussing: How do developmental issues come to play when supporting these clients? The students will pull from the reflective questions they wrote when they were observer to facilitate this discussion. This *Unstructured Role-Play* offers the opportunity for students to experientially apply the content from the human growth and development course.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Although not as much as with real counseling, some attention needs to be given to ethical considerations when role-play is used in counseling courses. An example of an ethical situation that can come up, especially in *Unstructured Role-Play*, is a student who is role-playing offers a real problem that the counselor-in-training is not prepared to handle. It is integral for the professor to be aware and alert of this possibility. As such, educators could consider sharing with the class that students should be careful as to what they share. The counselor educator may caution students, provide examples of what is and may not be appropriate, and importantly, note that if students feel any concerns related to the role-plays, that they may address these with the professor.

Further, giving students opportunities to submit reflection papers, wherein they reflect on their role-play experiences, may allow counselor educators insight into student experiences. This

can be a private manner for students to relay issues and concerns they may have, given that the counselor educator is not able to be present for every minute of every student's role-play experience. Reflection papers, as such, can be fruitful for counselor educators for a myriad of reasons, as they produce insight into what is going well and not so well, so counselor educators can tailor future role-play exercises accordingly.

While using various teaching strategies to augment instruction, educators are responsible for remaining sensitive to fundamental ethical issues (e.g., confidentiality), varied student needs, and appropriate academic standards (Morrissette & Gadbois, 2006). When instrumenting role-play in counselor training programs, the educator must consider and attend to classroom culture and developmental level of counseling students, and tailor the experiential sections of the course accordingly (Morrissette & Gadbois, 2006). Morrissette and Gadbois (2006) caution counselor educators as they instrument role-plays in the classroom, as they may “unknowingly impose their own agenda and preferences on students without considering the consequences associated with such behavior” (p. 138). Moreover, as with the utilization of any teaching strategy, the counselor educator needs to consider their biases, the needs of the students, and ethical implications.

### **Conclusion**

Role-play can be a valuable active learning strategy when teaching the human growth and development course. Students learn more, get more comfortable with the counseling process, and enjoy the classes more when counselor educators implement experiential learning strategies (Horton, 2021). Counselor educators can utilize three various role-play implementation strategies, based upon the needs of the course: *Structured Role-Play*, *Semi-Structured Role-Play*, and *Unstructured Role-Play*. These role-play instrumentation strategies can be integrated into various counseling courses, including the human growth and development course, furthering learning of

how to counsel clients across the lifespan. Practice makes progress, and role-plays create a space for counselors-in-training to progress in their ability to apply developmental theory with the clients they will serve.

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