

Using Role Play to Develop Cultural Reciprocity

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ABSTRACT

Teacher educators in higher education and school system staff development offices have been grappling with the issues of developing cultural and diversity competencies in the present and emerging teaching force. Students and families from diverse cultural backgrounds present challenges that can impact teacher effectiveness.

The new Council for Exceptional Children's *Standards for Beginning Special Education Teachers* includes the words "diversity" and "culture" under nine of the ten Special Education principles, identifying essential teacher competencies like the following:

- a) Special educators understand that beliefs, traditions and values across and within cultures affect relationships among and between students, families and school community. (Principle #3)
- b) [Special educators must be able to] mediate controversial intercultural issues among students within the learning environment in ways that enhance any culture, group, or person. (CC6S9)

This presentation provides one strategy, role play, that can be used to develop some of these competencies for culturally-responsive practice in teacher education and staff development. The literature suggests that models for case studies, including role play, group discussion, written analysis, and student-constructed cases, increase understanding of concepts in special education. In our research, qualitative data from student journals indicate that role play is the most effective case study technique for providing students opportunities to a) examine their personal identities and biases, and b) develop skills in interpersonal conflict resolution within the safety of the college classroom. Through these role plays, the students have the opportunity to "live" the situations, and develop communication skills, and skills in problem solving and building relationship through conversation. The impromptu nature of role play affords the facilitator with multiple

opportunities to stop the action at any “teachable moment” to solicit alternative points of view and discuss options for approaching the conflict situations.

In this workshop, presenters will present a theoretical framework for the case study approach, with descriptions of various techniques, and for cultural reciprocity. Next, they will facilitate two scenarios for role play involving a conflict of cultural values related to planning in an IEP meeting. Presenters will facilitate debriefing of the role play and discussion of the application of this technique. Finally, participants will have an opportunity to design strategies for implementing this approach in their own professional practice, with coaching from the presenters.