

Role Play Activities in Small Programs: What, Why, Where, and How?

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ABSTRACT

Preservice teachers need many opportunities to practice teaching skills prior to using the skills in high-stakes settings like real, live classrooms. Role play is an accessible and flexible option for embedding skill practice into individual courses. They may focus on specific high-leverage practices (HLPs) and enable preservice teachers to engage in activities to use skills learned across courses. This article provides an analysis of why to use role play, suggestions on when to use role play, and steps and resources for creating and using your own role play activities. We conclude with lessons learned by our Small Special Education Program.

KEYWORDS

Role play, small programs, special education, teacher preparation preparation

Professor Fields knows her preservice teachers need more practice with the collaboration skills she teaches them, but the question is how? The class has analyzed videos of collaboration gone wrong and of some functional collaborative groups, but there is a difference between identifying skills and using them. After talking with colleagues, she learns about the potential of role plays to address this need.

Teacher preparation is an ever-evolving field, with researchers and instructional faculty always searching for better ways to prepare preservice teachers (Mueller & File, 2015). Often the conversation about program improvement centers around getting preservice teachers more experience in the classroom. However, field experiences are rife with both logistical issues and the issue of preservice teachers practicing on students before they are competent and confident in the skill. Additionally, the logistics of appropriate supervision can be a great challenge in a small program with few faculty to share the load (Reid, 1994).

McDonald and colleagues (2013)

proposed a cycle of learning explicitly including opportunities for preservice teachers to prepare and rehearse a practice before using it with learners. Benedict et al. (2016) have labeled these practice-based learning opportunities (PLOs). Brownell et al. (2019) identified seven PLOs that include elements of effective practice such as modeling, authenticity, and feedback. These seven include: (a) case learning, (b) rehearsal, (c) video analysis, (d) virtual reality simulations, (e) coaching, (f) lesson study, and (g) coursework aligned with field experiences. Ideally, preservice teachers would engage in a variety of PLOs throughout their preparation program; each appropriate at different stages of their development as teachers. For example, case learning is more appropriate for focusing on understanding and analyzing students (Brownell et al., 2019). Others, like rehearsal and lesson study, help preservice teachers improve their teaching skills (Brownell et al., 2019). The nature of PLOs creates opportunities for preservice teachers to combine pedagogical content skills and high-leverage practices (HLPs) in a practice environment with feedback that

will not directly impact students.

What are Role Plays?

Rehearsal is an umbrella term for PLOs like microteaching and role play, defined as “candidates teach to peers as if they were P-12 students” (Brownell et al., 2019, p. 342). Role play can help preservice teachers “explore realistic situations by interacting with other people in a managed way in order to develop experience and trial different strategies in a supported environment” (Glover, 2014, para 1). It is this structure and faux-immersion that sets role play apart from other forms of rehearsal. During a role play, candidates are provided roles in a school-based scenario, such as a teacher-parent conference, lesson facilitation, or a teacher-paraprofessional interaction. They may be given scripts, specific instructions for what to say or how to act, or simply given the scenario and asked to react to the interactions as they unfold (Glover, 2014). The same scenario can be re-played multiple times by multiple candidates based on suggestions made during feedback and reflection sessions with the instructor and classmates. An additional unique element is role play has the flexibility to provide practice opportunities for non-instructional skills. Role plays can be considered through the lenses of (a) acting role plays, which concentrate on practicing new skills; (b) problem-solving role plays, which may require learners to draw from a wide set of skills but for one specific purpose; and (c) “Almost Real Life” role plays, which mimic the complexities of the real world as much as possible (Hidayati & Pardjono, 2018). Regardless, prior instruction and preparation in the skills is important so learners feel like they gain something from the activity (Stevens, 2015).

Why use Role Plays?

There are many benefits to utilizing

role plays in the higher education classroom. Role plays provide opportunities for practice, elements of authenticity, as well as chances to collaborate cross-curriculum. Role plays also combat many common challenges small Special Education teacher preparation programs face such as a lack of diversity, small cohorts of students, and small budgets (Reid, 1994).

Evidence Base

There is an evidence-base for use of rehearsal and role play in each of the four HLP areas. In the HLP area of instruction, there is evidence rehearsal improves use of technology to meet instructional goals (Yenmez et al., 2016), and with a clear rubric guiding peer and self-evaluation, it improves the use of explicit instruction (Cabello & Topping, 2018). Role play has been effective in preparing preservice teachers to appropriately interact with and help a learner who has mental health needs (Grief Green et al., 2020), including skills reflected in the social/emotional/behavior HLPs. Though research is lacking to declare role play and other forms of rehearsal as effective in HLPs related to assessment and collaboration, there is evidence of effectiveness in development of professionalism in medical (Ohta et al., 2021) and social work preparation (Gomez-Poyato et al., 2020).

Opportunities for Practice

Role plays provide multiple opportunities for practice in a safe, faculty-controlled environment (Presnilla-Espada, 2014). Mistakes can be made without direct, negative impact on a child or the relationship with the family. When mistakes are made, they create teachable moments, mentoring, and reflection (Presnilla-Espada, 2014).

The day of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting role play, Hannah is late to Professor Fields' class

and causes disruption to the meeting already in progress as she asks questions to catch up. Her classmates feel like she was not invested in the meeting. After the role play is over, Professor Fields discusses the importance of punctuality and the possible impact a seemingly small issue might have. Had this situation occurred in an actual classroom, Hannah may have offended the student's family with her tardiness and interruptions. This would have impacted her future conversations with the family and possibly interactions with the student. It may also have negatively impacted her relationships with co-workers who felt she was not doing her fair share of the workload. Although Hannah's classmates were frustrated with her tardiness, they all learned from experience how it could impact the process.

Elements of Authenticity

While a role play is a staged scenario, there are elements of authenticity built in through content, character development, and the natural interactions of the preservice teachers. Faculty can draw from their own experiences to set up interactions, using complexities of real life to prepare candidates for what they will experience in schools. This can include practical information such as actual (anonymous) student data. For example, a role-played IEP meeting for Henry (name changed) will be much more authentic when it draws from the experience of a real repeating kindergarten pyromaniac who was moved around the foster care system while his mother's parental rights were being terminated. Looking at authentic data with background information, candidates get a more authentic view of the relationship between behavior and home life. Role plays do not have to be built on immediate faculty experiences to be true-to-life; scenarios and character information can be pulled from resource-

es written in first-person accounts of situations. This universal design element helps increase motivation and relevance for the preservice teachers, thus allowing them to internalize and comprehend the content more efficiently (CAST, 2018). In role plays where preservice teachers are interacting with other students, their peers playing the student roles have directions and perspectives outlined so their behavior and language can intentionally guide the candidate's experience towards the practice goal. In teacher-teacher role play scenarios, two preservice teachers may interact in a situation such as co-teaching a lesson or a classroom management concern, they will apply their knowledge of collaboration skills. They must come to group consensus, often compromising somewhere in the middle of where each team member wanted to be. They practice active listening as well as sensitivity to student-related issues. These collaboration skills can be abstract concepts for preservice teachers with little to no field experience, but are strong indicators of teaching performance (Ingles, 2015).

Jamal and Sarah role play co-teachers who are having some classroom management issues. Jamal's role material for the general educator explains that Jamal knows a lot of the kids from the neighborhood and from having their older siblings. Jamal feels like he has a good relationship with the students and that this should carry him through any behavioral rough patches. He does not mind a slightly loud class and thrives a little on students not raising their hands—they had something to say and could not hold it back! In the meantime, Sarah's role material for the special educator describes how she values structure and routine and cannot understand how anybody can learn in a chaotic classroom. Sarah wants a fun classroom, but she's been collecting data and it's very clear that students are breaking rules

because they are not being enforced. When Jamal and Sarah meet they have to work through their very different, and realistic, differences in order to both be effective in the classroom.

Collaborate in Cross-curricular activities

Within our Small Special Education Program (SSEP), we found unique opportunities for faculty to collaborate in cross-curricular role play activities. While some SSEPs may have only one special education faculty member, there may also be 1-2 faculty members in the psychology department who would love to bring their students in to role play discussing testing data during an IEP meeting. Another option is finding someone from the applied behavior analysis department who would be willing to collaborate on a functional behavior assessment/behavior intervention plan (FBA/BIP) role play activity. Faculty in social work might have candidates who could participate in a role play team meeting so as to provide insight on family relationships and serve as advocates for families in multiple activities. Again, this collaboration adds a layer of authenticity, connecting research to practice.

Professor Fields is talking about role play with Mr. Jennings, a colleague in the social work department. Mr. Jennings comments that his future social workers have a lot of field placement hours, but he would like to provide them with practice opportunities as he's teaching. They team up and create IEP role plays, prereferral role plays, and social skills group role plays, where preservice teachers and social workers can practice together.

Addressing Issues of Diversity

Small programs often lack diversity in their candidate populations (Drake et al., 2021). Identifying or creating role

play scenarios allow faculty to introduce more diversity into their preservice teachers' worlds. Instructors can introduce topics of diversity by including roles such as same-sex parents, single parents, religious considerations, as well as other cultural and ethnic opportunities. For example, preservice teachers may find themselves working with a child of Deaf adults (CODA) in a role play. Preservice teachers can find themselves unprepared for the cultural norms of the Deaf community, as well as the accommodations which should be provided during meetings. The varied experiences faculty can create may address preservice teachers' cultural competence as well.

After a recent role play activity, Frances reflects on her role as a parent who was not fluent in English. She writes in her journal, "At the beginning of the meeting, they tried. They used smaller words and gestures, but when the terms got technical it was like they abandoned all thought of involving me in the meeting. I didn't really have a chance to be an active participant."

Working with Small Budgets

Small programs also work with small budgets (Reid, 1994). Computer-simulated experiences are available for sale through various platforms (e.g., Mursion, SimSchools), and may seem realistic; however, they are costly for small special education programs. Some companies charge rates based on the number of students enrolled in a program: the more students, the cheaper the cost (Mursion Virtual Classroom, n.d.). While this is an economic benefit for larger schools, serving hundreds of preservice teachers each year, for a SSEP, only serving 15-20 students per cohort, the cost will increase rapidly. Role play scenarios, on the other hand, can be created from a wide range of textbook materials readily available to instructors

TABLE 1: Resources for Role Play Contexts

Resource	Summary
Boothe, K. A., & Hathcote, A. R. (2021). <i>A case study approach to writing individualized special education documents: From preschool to graduation</i> . Council for Exceptional Children.	Follows a single learner's journey from early intervention through transition. Includes detailed information from multiple perspectives including, uniquely, the school social worker and external vocational professional.
CEEDAR: https://cedar.education.ufl.edu/portfolio/content-specific-simulated-interaction/#toggle-id-3	Description of a structured series of PLOs, with role play being the first two of four stages.
Danforth, S., & Boyle, J. R. (2007). <i>Cases in behavior management</i> (2nd ed.). Pearson.	Focused on behavior management. Most cases are 2-3 pages, describing an incident and then background information.
Friend, M. & Cook, L. (2016) <i>Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals</i> (8th ed.). Pearson.	Each chapter contains small 1-2 page vignettes encouraging communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution.
Hallahan, D. P., Kauffman, J. M., & Pullen, P. C. (2009). <i>Cases for reflection and analysis for Exceptional Learners</i> (11th ed.). Pearson.	Supplementary casebook for Exceptional Learners textbook-can be used independently. Cases include IDEA categories and multiple perspectives including families with diverse backgrounds. Cases are 4-5 pages and include reflection questions.
Halmhuber, N. & Beauvais, K. J. (2002). <i>Case studies about children and adolescents with special needs</i> . Allyn & Bacon.	Provides a context for learning, describing one particular school district prior to student-specific cases. Cases cover IDEA categories. Cases are 3-4 pages long with multiple characters outlined, reflection questions and activities.
Ingles, S. (2015). <i>Developing Critical Skills: Interactive Exercises for Pre-service Teachers</i> (1st ed.). Kendall Hunt.	Provides disposition rubrics for self-reflection and team evaluations
IRIS Center: https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/	Modules, case studies, and activities on various topics in Special Education including, but not limited to, IEPs and FBAs.
Kauffman, J. M., Pullen, P. L., Mostert, M. P., & Trent, S. C. (2011). <i>Managing classroom behaviors: A reflective case-based approach</i> (5th Ed). Pearson	Most cases focus on specific student behaviors. The faculty manual is a valuable shortcut for defining the necessary perspectives.
Kauffman, J. M. (2005). <i>Cases in emotional and behavioral disorders of children and youth</i> . Pearson.	Focused on different aspects and types of EBD. Most are 1-2 pages and focused on student behavior. Includes specific questions and prompts for each case study.
Overton, S. (2016). <i>Collaborating with families: A case study approach</i> . Waveland. (Original work published 2005)	Case studies with complex backstories. A grid lays out issues covered in each case (i.e., employment issues, dangerous behavior, cultural diversity, disability label). Cases are 10+ pages each.
Weishaar, M. K., & Scott, V. G. (2006). <i>Practical cases in special education for all educators</i> . Houghton Mifflin.	Cases mostly align with IDEA labels and include contemplation and exemplar focuses. Cases are 4-5 pages and include multiple perspectives and reflection questions. Many include scripted dialogue between parties.
Weishaar, M. K. & Scott, V. G. (2005). <i>Case studies in assessment of students with disabilities</i> . Pearson.	Cases provide assessment data which focuses on academic skills rather than disability categories, including written language, reading, transition, and oral language & bilingual. Each topic provides two cases, elementary and secondary settings. Cases are 4-5 pages in length and include questions related to assessment concerns and test interpretation.

(see Table 1), or from the memory and experiences of faculty, at minimal to no cost to preservice teachers or the instructors, making them a clear choice for the budget-conscious.

How Does One Use Role Plays?

Professor Fields is savvy enough to know she cannot just march into class, hand out a role play, and expect her preservice teachers to practice and develop skills. She knows she needs to do some prep work, but what?

Though spontaneous role play is possible, it looks more like dramatic improv than a true learning experience. To ensure preservice teachers meet learning objectives, it is important to set up and plan the experience. We suggest the following five-step approach.

Step 1: Provide Context

How much background preservice teachers need will depend greatly on the purpose of the role play, but it is important for each participant to understand the situation and their role's perspective. Some role play resources provide very specific data (i.e., reading scores) and a rich backstory, but many do not. Mixing materials from a variety of sources such as family background and assessment data can provide a more rich context. There exist a number of resources faculty can use for role plays (see Table 1).

Many of these resources are case studies. Faculty can use the case studies to build background for role play but will need to adjust so there is a problem to solve or an issue to discuss within the role play. Some of the resources pre-date Rosa's Law, so be ready to adjust language as well to reflect the change to intellectual disability.

After instruction on interacting with parents, Professor Fields is preparing role plays where special educators are calling the parents of one of their learn-

ers. She wants the experience to mimic the reality that each party knows things, thinks things, feels things the other party does not. She creates two paragraphs of background each for the special educator role and the parent role and gives each preservice teacher only their role. One of the roles includes a problem and the goal for the interaction.

Step 2: Assign Roles

Ideally, each preservice teacher has a role during the activity, so they are an active participant and learner (Stevens, 2015). In a large class or when the number of preservice teachers and the number of roles are not the same, it is best to add roles for alternates or understudies. Using small groups increases the number of learners actively engaged in the role play, but if the learning objective calls for a small group of learners engaging in the role play while all others watch, prepare the observers with specific tasks so they are actively engaged. Hidayati and Pardjono (2018) suggest assigning each observer a specific role to watch instead of providing general directions about attending to all parties. Give observers prompts to guide their observation of the event, which can then serve as a scaffold to the final reflection. For example, role playing an individualized education program (IEP) meeting would require many roles (see Table 2), possibly making it more efficient to have the rest of the class observe one meeting than trying to create multiple meetings. Depending on the size of the class, two parents may be assigned, as well as a student. The two-parent option allows the faculty to construct a variety of scenarios in which the participants are role playing talking to divorced/married parents, and different/same-sex couples. Adding a case student into the meetings allows for practice with student-centered dialogue. Preservice teachers can practice asking the case student ques-

tions about each component of the IEP rather than the more common practice of speaking around the student. The following are a sample of prompts appropriate for guiding observations in a role play of a transition-focused individualized education program (IEP) meeting:

1. Provide an example of a student-centered comment made during the meeting. Who made the comment and how was it received?
2. Did the student have a voice?
3. How was data used to make decisions?

Provide ample time for participants to prepare for the activity. While the context provides details necessary for the activity, preservice teachers should spend time "fleshing out" the character, in terms of strengths, needs, interests, teaching strategies most often used in class, etc. Preservice teachers can draw from observations during their field experiences or their own time as a student in school, or the perspectives of their own parents and past teachers. For roles that do not match the preservice educator's area of study (i.e., general educator, parent, principal), this planning time may focus on generating questions someone in their role may have or considering what the person brings to the table.

Professor Fields assigns Jordan to be a parent for the first role play. He reads the background she constructed and prepares a list of concerns he would have as the parent. Meanwhile, Alejandra reads the background for the teacher role and decides how she wants to begin the phone call. She identifies relevant details and makes up those she feels are vital but are not provided.

Step 3: Explain the Rules

For preservice teachers to get the most out of role plays, they need to learn what the rules and norms are for the interaction. Rules are "written expectations for

TABLE 2: Example Roles for an IEP meeting

Role	Responsibilities to meeting
School Psychologist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explains evaluation results-starting with strengths of the child • Explains how assessments are meaningful and directly related to this particular student's needs • Heavily involved in making sure PLAAFP statements correctly reflect evaluation results • Can provide input on testing accommodations based on experience in evaluation administration
Parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes child's strengths and needs from home perspective • Keeps focus of conversation on child • Advocates for child • Advise committee on techniques used at home
Special Education Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most often is faculty member with most contact with student • Expert in accommodations, modifications, and individualized planning to address specific needs of student • Encourages self-advocacy when student is present
General Education Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum focus helps determine to what extent will this child be successful participating in the general education setting (Effects Statement) • May or may NOT have direct contact with student • Can identify needs of staff to support student • Can draw comparisons on students in general education academic performance and this student's data
School district representative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitator- keeps people on task • Peacekeeper • Notetaker • Facilitates "Active listening" • Ensures meeting conforms to legal requirements of federal statutes • Commits district resources
Child/Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expert on own interests, preferred teaching methods • Should help guide transition conversations

Note: Modified from *The IRIS Center. (2019). IEPs: Developing high-quality individualized education programs.*

behavior" whereas norms are "familiar ways of interacting in a classroom" (Evertson et al., 2003, p. v). Norms revolving around respect, responsibility, and learning help create the supportive environment necessary for preservice teachers to take the risk of practicing new skills (Evertson et al., 2003). These may seem obvious to faculty, but it is important faculty assume nothing and work with the class to come to common understanding of rules and norms. As in any class, the faculty member may set some rules, but then have preservice teachers work together to create a list of norms for themselves. Prompt

the class to consider their professional dispositions, perhaps by studying the department's list, and to draw from experiences in collaboration, both previous personal experience (i.e., how have you been respected and disrespected in the past?) and prior knowledge from coursework. The below list is an example of what a class may develop.

- Take turns speaking
- Practice active listening
- Avoid cultural stereotypes
- Stay student-centered

Once developed, it is helpful to visibly post the rules and norms while preparing for and engaging in role play, and

to go over the list immediately prior to interactions. In a course where there are multiple role plays throughout the semester, revisit the list to evaluate its appropriateness each time.

Step 4: Facilitate

Once the context is set, the participants are prepared, and rules have been established, it is time to begin the role play. Depending on the objective of the interaction, it may be extremely clear who initiates dialogue (i.e., teacher calling a parent) or the group may need to determine the initiator, dependent upon their roles and in consultation with

each other (i.e., the principal welcomes everyone to the IEP meeting and begins introductions). The faculty member's role is to observe during these activities, though they may intervene when necessary. Examples of time faculty may intervene include when faculty observe:

1. Culturally stereotypical behaviors and “teachable moments.” With a lack of diversity in smaller programs often comes an assumption of some stereotypical norms in different cultures. The thorough exploration of “characters” prior to the activity itself should help control for most of this, but it is important to call out stereotypical behaviors immediately. While some faculty may choose to hold off on any interruptions during the activity, culturally stereotypical behaviors may cause offense to others in the group and shift the dynamics of the activity.

Professor Fields has described a parent as living in a neighborhood where their child observes violence regularly. The preservice teacher assigned this role speaks using an accent and includes gestures linked to gang. Professor Fields steps in immediately to have a discussion about respect, bias, and making assumptions.

2. A group coming to conclusion too easily or stalling out before reaching conclusion. One benefit of small programs that turns into a concern for role play activities is the strong level of comfort cohort members have with one another. Faculty may need to prompt conflict in order for preservice teachers to move out of their comfort zones and address contrasting ideas.

Professor Fields notices one group is no longer talking and appears to be done. She asks each person if they are happy with the conclusion, and then reminds them of important aspects of the role play they have not discussed, or did not consider intentionally. “The parents were really unhappy with the way their

son was being treated, does this conclusion placate them or actually solve the root issue?”

3. Someone stepping out of character in the midst of activity.

In the middle of the parent-teacher conference role play, Alfred, playing the role of general educator, stopped the conversation to grab his lunch from his girlfriend standing at the classroom door. The faculty member discussed the behavior right then and there, explaining the “parent” was skipping her lunch break from work to be at this meeting. How might the parent react to seeing you eating in front of her or taking time out to chat with a significant other during her child’s meeting?

Step 5: Reflect

Researchers across disciplines agree reflecting after the role play is at least as important as the role play itself (Joyner & Young, 2006; Ronning & Bjorkly, 2019). It can serve many purposes, but ultimately “reflection helps a professional to become more self-regulated, conscious and self-critical” (Ronning & Bjorkly, 2019, p. 417). The reflection process can be completed as a whole group discussion, one-on-one conferencing, independent writing tasks, or some combination of these. You may want to allow time between the activity and the reflection for candidates to digest the experience through contemplation and review of video recordings, if available. Often, faculty provide preservice teachers with feedback before engaging in the reflection process.

Quality reflection requires some structure. Without structure, reflection tends to be a summary of what happened during the role play, not a reflection on the preservice teacher's behavior or thoughts about the interactions. Rubrics can provide that structure. Joyner and Young (2006) used rubrics for self-reflection and peer feedback for medical

role plays, including prompts to rate communication skills (rapport, empathy, attitude), patient centeredness, verbal and non-verbal communication, and clinical skills. Rubrics for education role plays may prompt participants to evaluate and provide feedback to peers regarding preparedness, professionalism, and overall engagement in the tasks.

Structure can also be achieved through the use of reflection prompts. Prompts should encourage candidates to reflect role play behaviors, comments, and outcomes as well as next steps. Some reflection prompt examples are:

1. Defend decisions made during the activity or address any conflicts which occurred during the meeting.

2. When you were in the role of parent, how did the teacher's words make you feel? If the words or nonverbal communication upset you or made you proud or happy, why? What exactly sparked these emotions? Did you feel the teacher was invested in your imaginary child? Why or why not?

3. Did you feel heard, and like you heard all others? Was the solution more one person's idea than another? Why or why not?

4. In the professional role, what would you do next? The meeting is over, you walk out the door, how do you follow through with the results of the meeting?

Finally, have the preservice teachers reflect on next steps in their own professional development. A preservice teacher can reflect on how, as a special education teacher, they would go about sharing the results of the implementation of a BIP with the parents. The candidate may also reflect on how, as a student teacher, they will spend some time with the school's behavior specialist to gain more experience with the FBA process. Another preservice teacher may decide to read more research on family-centered planning based on his experience during the meeting.

TABLE 3: IEP meeting considerations

HLP alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Assessment • Social/Emotional/Behavioral • Instruction
Embedded skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data analysis • Data-based decisions • Culturally-responsive approaches • Student-centered dialogue • Active listening
Required roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IDEA requirements
Faculty considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite Psychology, Counseling, Social Work majors to take this course and play the corresponding roles
Possible course outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectively communicate assessment results to parents and caregivers of young children with special needs • Describe the purpose and forms of assessments • Apply the assessment results to Individual Education Plans (IEP) for development of appropriate goals and objectives for students with disabilities • Effectively communicate state and federal mandates related to assessment of children with disabilities
Assessment tool(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed IEP • Individual rating scores • Team rating scores

Sarah was the parent in the role play and is reflecting on the experience. As she considers some of the words used to describe her imaginary son, and how little the teachers listened to her concerns, Sarah realizes how important it is to adjust her behavior so she does not do these things when teaching.

Where to use Role Plays?

Opportunities for role play scenarios can be created in many teacher preparation courses. The four examples presented here: (1) Assessment, (2) Transition, (3) Behavior management, and (4) Collaboration are broad titles that may include a wide range of courses at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

Assessment courses

When presenting student data to

stakeholders, teachers utilize professional dispositions such as active listening, compromise, and demonstrating cultural competence. In fact, facilitating effective meetings with professionals and families has been identified as an HLP (McLesky et al., 2017). In assessment courses, preservice teachers can practice these skills through role-playing IEP meetings with classmates. (See Table 3).

In addition to working on these skills, IEP meetings allow for the application of course content. The special educator, school psychologist, and general education teacher have to understand the assessment data to be able to share it with other members of the team. Data analysis in relation to appropriate goal-setting is a common student learning objective in Assessment courses.

Transition courses

By its very nature, transition, whether it be into kindergarten, college, or the workforce, has to revolve around the desires of a learner and their family (Jones & Gallus, 2016). It can be hard to develop the skill of negotiating what the student wants, what the family wants, student assessment data, and available resources. Role plays can simulate the process and engage preservice teachers in working as a team with community members to set long and short-term transition goals, and create the plan to achieve those goals. (See Table 4).

Behavior management courses

One of the top reasons for exiting the teaching profession is poor behavior management (Burnsting et al., 2014; Grant, 2017). Role play activities such as phone

TABLE 4: Transition planning considerations

HLP alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Assessment • Social/Emotional/Behavioral • Instruction
Embedded skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student & family-centered planning • Culturally-responsive approaches • Active listening
Required roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Education teacher • School counselor • Community members such as employers
Faculty considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow preservice teachers time to explore actual community resources in their neighborhoods • Invite guests from the community join the sessions • Allow Counseling majors to take this course and play the corresponding role
Possible course outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe self-determination and how is it fostered in adolescents and young adults with disabilities • Effectively involve families in the transition planning of children with disabilities • Demonstrate culturally sensitive practices in transition planning • Identify community resources necessary for effective transition planning
Assessment tool(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed Transition plan • Community member feedback form

calls to parents and meetings to discuss functional behavioral assessments (FBA) can provide multiple opportunities for addressing non-compliant behaviors in the classroom. The FBA, specifically, can include multiple cross-curricular connections. (See Table 5).

Collaboration courses

Faculty within our SSEP find that collaboration skills of preservice teachers are difficult to assess, but they are vital for success in the classroom (Ricci & Fingon, 2017). Whether a course concentrates on the relationships with other professionals or with parents, key elements must include active listening, problem-solving, negotiating, respectfully disagreeing, sharing ideas, and asking questions (McLeskey et al., 2017). Role play in a collaboration course can consist of scenarios similar to those of other courses addressed above, including phone calls

home. While the primary objective in the collaboration course would be to improve preservice teachers' communication and collaboration skills, scenarios can easily help meet secondary objectives related to diversity, social-emotional needs and concerns, and instruction. (See Table 6 on Page 17).

Lessons Learned

Though role plays clearly have a place in teacher education, they are not a panacea and create challenges of their own. First, role plays cannot be the only practice-based learning opportunity preservice teachers experience in their preparation. They are good for early experiences to practice skills, for considering situations from multiple perspectives, and for building comfort with the unknown, but they are not a replacement for working with real learners. Role plays do not bring in all real-life

variables of the classroom. Faculty can use role plays in combination with other practice-based learning opportunities.

A challenge of using role plays is the resources involved in creating them, especially for small programs who have fewer faculty to collaborate in creating role plays. There are few role play resources that can be picked up and used without adjustment of any kind, which means faculty are either creating role plays from scratch or spending time adjusting existing case study resources to make them into role play scenarios. Small program faculty tend to have higher teaching loads and teach a broader range of courses than in larger programs, making the investment of time an obstacle. Table 1 lists resources to help get started. Becoming a member of the Small Special Education Program Caucus (SSEPC) of the Teacher Education Division (TED) of the Council for

TABLE 5: FBA/BIP considerations

HLP alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Assessment • Social/Emotional/Behavioral
Embedded skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observational skills • Qualitative writing • Student-centered dialogue • Culturally-responsive approaches • Active listening
Required roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Education teacher • General Education teacher • School psychologist • Behavior specialist • Parent/Guardian • Student (depending on age of case student)
Faculty considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit instruction in A-B-C analysis and fidelity checks should be completed prior to observations and meetings • Allow ABA and Psychology majors to take this course and play the corresponding roles
Possible course outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement procedures for conducting functional assessments and developing appropriate behavior support plans • Evaluate the complexity of factors (social, educational, home, assistive technology and biological) influencing a child's classroom functioning • Evaluate community-based and internet-based sources of services, networks and organizations regarding children with emotional and behavioral disorders
Assessment tool(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed FBA and BIP • Reflection journal

Exceptional Children (CEC) would help faculty find others to collaborate with in developing role plays.

A critical component in the success of a role play is the existing relationship between the preservice teachers. Individuals who know each other well may find it harder to engage as if they were strangers (as in teacher-to-parent role plays) or in roles with different levels of power (administrator-teacher; teacher-paraprofessional). When preparation programs are designed in cohorts, which is common in small programs, this is exacerbated. Regardless of existing relationships, many preservice teachers find it difficult to engage with peers in roles that are adversarial, making it difficult to mimic the problem-solving and collab-

oration required for real life scenarios. Therefore, faculty can provide more rich contexts to help preservice teachers feel invested in their role. Consider including a bulleted list of what each individual wants and cares about for easy reference during the role play. Alternatively, consider pairing candidates with on-campus drama clubs or bringing in outside stakeholders or faculty to play roles.

A final concern with using role plays is assessment. If multiple role plays are happening at one time, there is a lot happening in the classroom, with different pods of learners engaged and talking at different parts of the process. The faculty member needs to be walking among the groups, listening, perhaps prompting if conversations are fizzling out premature-

ly. Ultimately, the preservice teachers are practicing a skill, and the faculty member will never know if they used the skills correctly unless they observe each of the role play groups in their entirety, presenting a time constraint. However, the same concern about assessment can be said about any form of rehearsal and practice-based learning opportunity. To address this, faculty can build questions to prompt preservice teachers to reflect on their performance, with self and peer assessment serving as feedback to faculty.

In education there are no silver bullets, and no single instructional strategy is appropriate for all situations. Role play is one strategy for providing preservice teachers with opportunities to practice skills in a protected and supportive

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environment, and it compliments other forms of rehearsal and practice in preparing quality teachers. The complexity of real-world scenarios in role plays allows preservice teachers to practice a wide range of skills, even if the primary context and application is focused in one area. Role plays may align with one or two HLPs by design but note it would be easy to structure the role play such that all HLP areas of practice were incorporated. Preservice teachers need to be able to engage in the complex tasks of everyday teaching, where HLPs are not in silos but work together. Role play provides this opportunity.

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TABLE 6: Phone calls home considerations

HLP alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration
Embedded skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal communication skills • Problem-solving • Compromising • Culturally-responsive approaches • Active listening
Required roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Education teacher • Parent/Guardian
Faculty considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each person in the scenario has a note card with his/her own perspective • Parent/Guardian does not know why teacher is calling, teacher does not know what information parent may have • In order to remove nonverbal cues from distracting participants, position partners out of view, similar to phone call environment
Possible course outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate communication strategies and approaches when providing input to colleagues as part of an interdisciplinary team. • Explain the importance of productive relationships and interactions among school, home, and community to enhance student learning.
Assessment tool(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disposition checklist- classmates participating as observers can complete this • Reflection journal

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