

Actors as Teachers in Graduate Education

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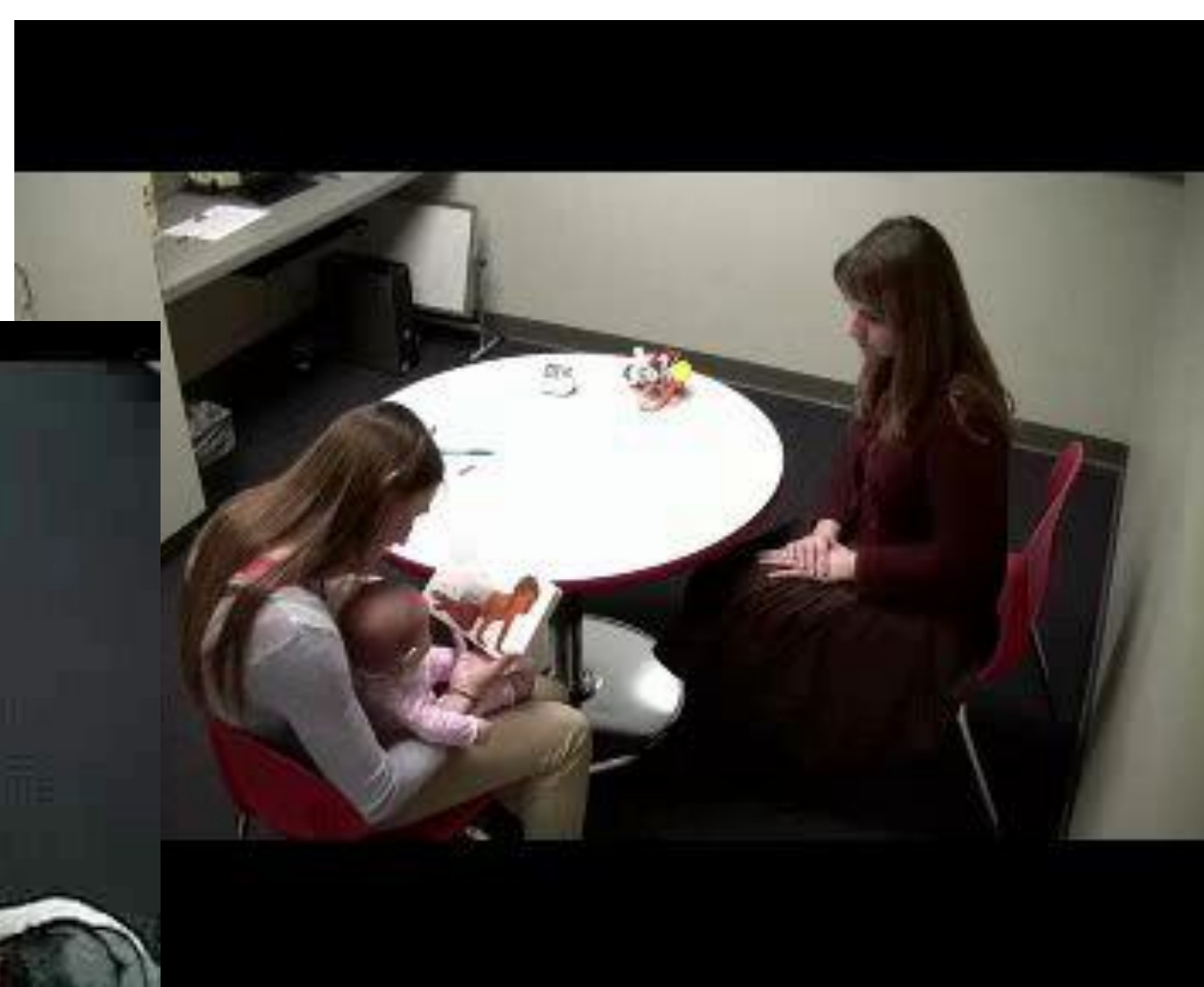
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Introduction

Role playing with peers has long been used in professional preparation programs to teach and practice skills. We propose the use of standardized patients (SPs) in lieu of peers to role play these encounters in a safe and effective way. SPs are individuals who have been trained to realistically portray a patient or family member in various scenarios set up to target a specific skill or communication technique for students (Barrows, 1968). SPs have been used for many years in the training and evaluation of medical and allied health professionals including physicians, nurses, and dentists (Basak et al., 2019; McKenzie et al., 2017; Saxena et al., 2021) with expansion to speech pathology more recently (Shorland et al., 2018; Zraick, 2004, 2012). At Fontbonne University, we have used both professional actors and trained volunteers as SPs in two courses for students pursuing master's degrees in speech-language pathology (SLP) and deaf education (DE). The move to synchronous online learning this past year afforded an opportunity to utilize SPs through tele-intervention. In this presentation, we share our experience with SPs in both in-person and virtual courses.

Our Experience

At Fontbonne University, we have used SPs in two of our courses – CDS 552 *Counseling Issues in Communication Disorders* and CDS 511 *Family Centered Intervention*. SP encounters for these courses was conducted in-person previously, but with the move to virtual learning this past year, due to COVID-19, required us to move our SP encounters online. This allowed us to give our students in St. Louis, as well as our distance learners in the Northeast United States and Canada, a chance to participate in this learning opportunity. These experiences challenge students, who are often nervous and apprehensive, through the scaffolded, desirable difficulty necessary for learning to occur. Following, are descriptions of the in-person and virtual procedures. Encounters were carried out in one-on-one scenarios in CDS 511 and as group activities in both courses.



SPs and students during in-person encounters.

Our Encounters

One-on-one SP Encounters:

- Students entered therapy rooms, equipped with video/audio recording capability, with the SP.
- Encounters lasted approximately 30 minutes, with 15-20 minutes for the family session or parent/teacher conference.
- After the SP encounter, the student left the room and the student and SP completed individual evaluation forms.
- Once forms were completed, the SP and student came back together for face-to-face feedback on the encounter.
- Videos were made available to students for review and reflection.
- COVID-19 Adaptation – Conducted virtually via Zoom, students were placed in breakout rooms with the SP and encounters were recorded by the student. Scripts for encounters were re-written to reflect the tele-intervention model.

In-class Group Encounters:

- The SP was positioned in the front of the class with students in a horseshoe in the classroom.
- The SP was provided a list of multiple difficult questions or scenarios that the students, instructors, and other professionals in the field submitted.
- One student was chosen to be the clinician and sit at the front of the class with the SP. The student chose a classmate to sit at the front with them to provide moral support and as a back-up if necessary.
- The SP began the encounter with a question from the list.
- “Time out”: At any point during the encounter, the student or instructor could call a “time out” to stop the scenario and “freeze the scene”. This was done if the student needed a minute to gather themselves, ask for help from their partner, or wanted to try again in a different way. The instructor utilized this to lead the scenario in a different direction or to ask a question about what was happening.
- Once that scenario/question was complete, the students returned to their seats and a new student was chosen for a new scenario.
- Students, instructors and SPs provided feedback directly to the student immediately following the scenario.
- COVID-19 Adaptation - Conducted virtually via Zoom, students chosen as the clinician, their chosen partner and the SP kept their cameras on while the rest of the class turned their cameras off to limit visual distractions. The chat was used to provide peer-to-peer encouragement and if “time outs” were called, students could add in the chat any ideas they had for the student.

References & Additional Information



SP and student during virtual encounter over Zoom.

Student Comments Regarding SP Encounter

“I think this was a great simulation because oftentimes, parents are complete strangers to us (especially for EI cases) just like these actors were strangers to us so it created a genuine experience where we needed to put our professional hats on. When we practice with colleagues or friends, we often allow the nervousness to get to us and begin to laugh or fall out of character. This simulation forced us to address our insecurities and push past them to remain professional with the actors.”

“I really enjoyed putting my knowledge to the test. It is a good way to figure out areas I need to brush up on, as well as areas I have strengths in. I really enjoyed the debrief with the actor, she gave wonderful feedback and was so easy to talk to.”

“Session was realistic. I gained an understanding of what an interaction with a parent would look like.”

“I liked that it gave me experience with counseling in a low stake environment. I think it helped me with my confidence to counsel and educate a real client's parents.”

Implications

The possibilities are endless when considering the use of SPs in professional preparation programs. SP encounters offer a safe, supported opportunity for students to practice communication, treatment, or evaluation skills while preparing for more challenging situations they will encounter in practice. The only limits are imagination and funding. We have used students from our university's theatre program and volunteers when funding was limited. A “course fee” to cover SP related expenses has been considered as students purchase simulation software or pay lab fees for some courses. Clients and family members from campus speech clinics may be trained to serve as SPs. We continue to expand our use of SPs with students within our deaf education and speech-language pathology programs while considering opportunities to utilize SPs in other programs across the university. Using SPs to foster interprofessional cooperation and development is among our other goals..