

Act it Out: Teaching Students How to Strive for Their Ideal Selves

Caroline M. Stanley, Ph.D

Bridgewater State University, 90 Burrill Avenue, Bridgewater

Abstract:

The present study evaluated the effectiveness of a role-playing assignment. Fixed-role enactment (Kelly, 1954) is a technique in which an individual constructs a hypothetical character based on a desired set of personality traits. The individual subsequently subsumes the character's identity during a fixed period of behavioral enactment. Kelly's (1954) fixed-role enactment was adapted into an assignment for students in a personality psychology course. The present, qualitative study explored the long-term impact of the role enactment assignment by evaluating student perceptions (N=56) of the assignment both immediately and in a 1-year follow-up. A grounded theory method was used to examine qualitative reports of the meaning that students ascribed to their fixed-role enactments. Results indicated that fixed-role enactment was an extremely positive and meaningful experience for students. Results also indicated that students continued to ascribe extremely positive and meaningful attributions to the assignment one year after its completion. Specifically, in addition to evoking positive personal change, the role enactment resulted in students experiencing new perspectives regarding (a) who they were (actual self), (b) who they could be (possible self), and (c) how to become the person they wished to be (ideal self). This study contributes to the literature on the effectiveness of experiential techniques and suggests that there may be positive, long-term implications associated with employing role-playing techniques in the classroom.