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Featured Article

Using Q-Methodology to Reveal Nurse Educators' Perspectives about Simulation Design

Jane B. Paige, PhD, RN, CNE^{a,*}, Karen H. Morin, DSN, RN, ANEF, FAAN^b

^aAssociate Professor, Milwaukee School of Engineering, Milwaukee, WI 53202, USA

^bDirector of PhD Program, College of Nursing, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI 53202, USA

KEYWORDS

simulation;
teaching perspectives;
Q-methodology;
epistemological beliefs;
simulation design
characteristics

Abstract

Background: Considering educators can hold varying beliefs toward teaching, it is to be expected a certain degree of subjectivity exists as educators make choices when designing and conducting simulation activities. The aim of this study was to discover nurse educators' perspectives (patterns of thought) about simulation design.

Method: In a Q-methodological approach, 44 nurse educators rank ordered 60 opinion statements about simulation design into a quasi-normal distribution grid.

Results: Factor analysis revealed nurse educators share an overriding Facilitate the Discovery perspective. Two secondary bipolar factors revealed educators hold opposing views about student role assignment, degree to provide student support, and when and if to stop a simulation.

Conclusions: Results suggest that ongoing and sustained educational development along with time for nurse educators to clarify their perspective about simulation design is essential. Further educational research on the extent to let students struggle during simulation activities and the emotional preparation students need before simulation activities is crucial. Awareness of perspectives (individual and shared) about simulation design enhances instructional delivery and develops educators' skill in simulation pedagogy.

Cite this article:

Paige, J. B., & Morin, K. H. (2015, January). Using Q-methodology to reveal nurse educators' perspectives about simulation design. *Clinical Simulation in Nursing*, 11(1), 11-19. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ecns.2014.09.010>.

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Simulation-based learning (SBL) is a pedagogical method poised to innovate nursing educational approaches (Ironsides & Jeffries, 2010; Parker & Myrick, 2012). Yet, despite a growing body of research on SBL, there is

limited investigation into educators' assumptions and beliefs that underpin simulation pedagogy (Schiavenato, 2009; Walton, Chute, & Ball, 2011). Considering educators can hold varying beliefs toward teaching and learning, it is to be expected a certain degree of subjectivity exists as educators operationalize the design of simulation activities. Subjectivity manifests itself within particular points of view or perspectives. Educators readily share their points of view about designing simulations both formally (in literature and conference presentations) and informally (ordinary conversations and ListServ postings). These

This article was a component of a doctoral dissertation by Jane B. Paige entitled *Simulation design characteristics: Perspectives held by nurse educators and nursing students*. This study was completed and submitted as requirement for dissertation to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in December 2013.

* Corresponding author: paige@msoe.edu (J. B. Paige).

types of conversations portray the subjectivity surrounding simulation design and become a vehicle for exploration. Currently, the number of different perspectives from which nurse educators use to design simulations is unknown. Gaining an awareness of these perspectives

(individual and shared) is a means to enhance instructional delivery and develop educators' skill in simulation design. Skillful teaching matures, as educators understand their own perspective, are able to explain it to others, and see beyond to those perspectives of others (Brookfield, 2006; Pratt, Boll, & Collins, 2007). As part of a larger study that aimed to describe and compare nurse educators' and nursing students' views about simulation design (Paige, 2013), this article reports on the research question, "what are nurse educators' perspectives about operationalizing simulation design

characteristics within SBL educational interventions?"

Key Points

- Nurse educators hold an overriding consensual perspective about simulation design.
- Nurse educators hold opposing views on student role assignment, providing student support, and stopping a simulation.
- Educational research on the extent to let students struggle during simulation activities and the emotional preparation students need prior to simulation activities is crucial.

Background

SBL involves the creation of a hypothetical situation for practical and theoretical learning (Bland, Topping, & Wood, 2010). Assimilation of SBL as a teaching/learning strategy into health care education has increased exponentially around the world (Dieckmann, 2009; Nehring & Lashley, 2010). Yet, as educators acquire knowledge about SBL with its associated new technologies, what cannot be overlooked is how SBL teaching and/or learning strategies fit into current teaching perspectives. Even as SBL touts a student-centered approach and educators may agree with this philosophy, deep-rooted assumptions more commonly associated with a teacher-centered approach exist, need to be uncovered, and possibly challenged. Without adequate time for reflection on why we teach the way we do, nurse educators can potentially design and conduct simulations that are not ideal (Clapper, 2010; Miller & Bull, 2013). If poorly designed SBL activities take place, the learner can leave with a false sense of learning or what Clapper (2010) calls a "confident incompetent" (p. e8). For various reasons, not all simulation design options (equipment availability, space limitation, educator comfort and knowledge level, student group numbers, context or purpose of simulation, and so forth) are always available, feasible, or

recommended. Consequently, educators are forced to decide between one choice over another, and an SBL activity may turn into a significantly different type of learning activity based on the choices educators make. As curricular and program decisions are being made on use of simulation activities, it is essential to first have confidence that the educational intervention was well designed and thought out.

Even as reports from systematic reviews indicate a preference exists for teaching with SBL (Howard, Englert, Kameg, & Perozzi, 2011; Laschinger et al., 2008), fewer studies explore the reasons why. Getting to this thinking involves a deeper probe into underlying assumptions and beliefs that distinguish the way educators think. This level of understanding is important, as there may be viewpoints precluded or overshadowed by extreme viewpoints. If this is the case, then not all voices are heard as best educational practices for simulation design are established.

Theoretical Framework

The National League for Nursing-Jeffries Simulation Framework (Jeffries, 2012) is a theoretical framework comprising five conceptual components (teacher, student, educational practices, simulation design characteristics, and student outcomes) that provide direction to educators as they plan, conduct, and evaluate simulation activities (Figure 1). In this study, the interaction of teacher, student, and educational practices on the five simulation design characteristics (objectives, student support, problem solving, fidelity, and debriefing) provided theoretical guidance for the gathering of a population of opinion statements about simulation design. Using these opinion statements as the unit of analysis, investigators employed a Q-methodological approach to reveal perspectives about simulation design held by nurse educators.

Methods

Q-Methodology

Q-methodology is a research approach that investigates subjectivity. Researchers typically select this approach when seeking to understand patterns of thought rather than the number of people that think a particular way (Brown, 1980; Stephenson, 1953). As such, Q-method is an exploratory approach that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques and contains unique terminology that needs some explanation (Brown, 1980; McKeown & Thomas, 2013). In Q-studies, investigators start with a large collection of opinion statements known as the *concourse* and considered the population. From this population of statements, a sample (known as the *Q-sample*) is drawn. Typically, a Q-sample of 40 to 60 statements is sufficient in number to

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